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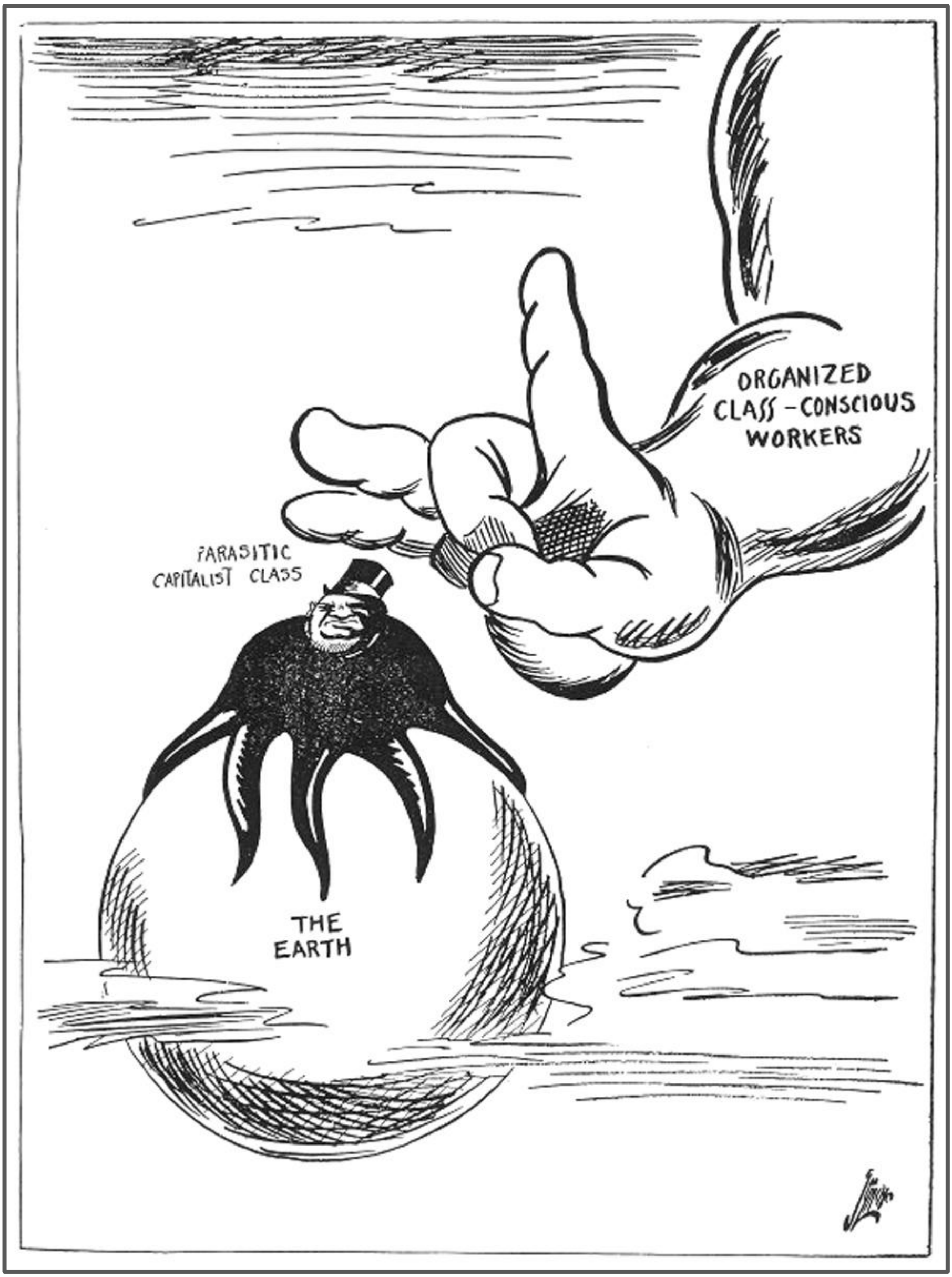
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Direct Action is the monthly newsletter of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation, an organ of theory and practice.

Abortion Access, a Luxury Jets, and Leaked State Secrets: Two Weeks in the Story of American "Democracy"

Three years before his death, Friedrich Engels wrote a short letter in an Italian socialist newspaper addressed to "the honorable Giovani Bovio." Bovio, a prominent member of the Parliament of the Kingdom of Italy, had criticized Engels and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) for allegedly failing to explain the form of government under which the working class would take power. "Will it be monarchic, or republican, or will it go back to Weitling's utopia," questioned Bovio. Engels, surely somewhat exasperated, responded that he and Marx had, on the contrary, described the form of workers' rule for almost their entire political careers: "[F]or forty years," wrote Engels, "Marx and I...repeated ad nauseam that for us the democratic republic is the only political form in which the struggle between the working class and the capitalist class can first be universalized and then culminate in the decisive victory of the proletariat." The Italian socialists, who strove to transform the political and social spheres of society, were not to be confused with the Italian Royalist Republicans.

Three recent headlines – a judicial attack on the abortion pill mifepristone, revelations that Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas took kickbacks from a wealthy friend, and the leak of Pentagon secrets revealing extensive U.S. spy programs and troops in Ukraine – provide an opportunity to dissect the undemocratic structure of the United States and the continued need for what Marx and Engels called for: the democratic republic.

In this article, I use these events as a launching pad to present the case for supporting Marxist Unity Group's resolution (linked above), which will bring the question of the democratic republic to the floor of DSA's national convention this August. To provide leadership for future working class struggles, the DSA must develop a strategic vision that opposes the existing state and the constitution that undergirds the entire edifice. Each abuse of power is an opportunity to expose the current state and propose the democratic republic as a concrete alternative and necessary stepping-stone to a classless society.

Abortion Access

On May 7, federal District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk overturned FDA approval of the widely-used abortion pill mifepristone, putting access to safe and legal abortion further at risk.

His ruling, 23 years after the fact, comes less than a year after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade (1973) and eliminated the constitutional right to an abortion. Both court decisions come when most Americans think abortion should be legal. The courts' flagrant disregard of popular opinion is further proof that all the basic rights we take for granted are subject to dismissal by a select number of unaccountable "representatives." The carpet can be pulled from under our feet that quickly.

It's worth reflecting on how federal judges and Supreme Court Justices are elected – or, rather, how they are not elected. Federal judges are nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate, an elite clique based on unequal representation (a liberal or conservative majority, it makes no difference) whose raison d'être is to guard against the will of the people as (insufficiently) expressed in the House of Representatives.

Supreme Court Justices are directly appointed by the President. Thanks to the siphoning of votes through the Electoral College, the President of the United States is an indirectly elected ruler. The undemocratic nature of the Electoral College has been blatantly exposed twice in the last twenty years when the eventual President received a minority of the total votes. Yet, panic over a system capable of periodically handing us a leader without a popular mandate quickly subsides; what is an endemic problem is presented as a momentary glitch. By design, the Electoral College works when it takes direct power out of the hands of voters.

Why are the dispensers of law chosen this way? A piece of paper, a Sacred Text known as the Constitution, worshiped in the most slovenly manner, commands such

actions. Future historians will laugh at the extent of our fetishism and the degree to which we have alienated our collective human powers in “Nine Elders and an Ancient Scroll.” Behold the rotten foundation of our entire political system.

Joe Biden and the Democratic Party would have us place our faith in the nine unelected Supreme Court Justices to defend access to mifepristone. Have they forgotten that this is the same Supreme Court that overturned Roe v. Wade? If the Court rules as we want, the Justices must be good and the system must work; if they don’t rule as we want, a few of the Justices must be rotten apples in an otherwise fresh barrel.

Will these nine enlightened beings save us from the decision of Judge Kacsmaryk? What kind-hearted souls will rule on the health and well-being of millions of Americans? To ask the question in such a way – as we are taught to do – reveals part of the problem. The fact that we look to ‘rational,’ ‘intelligent,’ or ‘benevolent’ figures for our salvation (and they must be all of those things because they can interpret the Sacred Text) and not to ourselves obscures the fundamental problem and the only solution.

And what of this Court and its nine somber-looking Justices? To be granted such great powers and a lifetime to wield them, surely they must stand on a higher plain than mere mortals. To be placed in a position so lacking in accountability, surely they must be able to resist all temptations. Not quite.

A Luxury air jet

On April 6, ProPublica published an extensive investigation into the relationship between Justice Clarence Thomas and real estate billionaire, Nazi memorabilia collector, and GOP donor Harlan Crow. For decades, Thomas traveled gratis on Crow’s private jet and vacationed at his gaudy lakeside resort. In 2014, Thomas sold hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of property to Crow, including a property linked to the Justice’s mother.

Now the Democrats want a new Court Justice: how brave. But changing the players in the game (a process that would rely on the minoritarian Senate) is no substitute for changing the game itself. Clarence Thomas isn’t the problem. The Supreme Court, as the ProPublica report states, is “left almost entirely to police itself.” Justices can choose to “consult” a code of conduct for federal judges below the Supreme Court – should they find it interesting. One imagines John Roberts leafing through a rulebook like a bored patient skims through a tabloid magazine in a doctor’s waiting room.

What do we expect from a person in a position of unaccountable power? The solution is not to find more “ethical” Justices but to eliminate the unaccountable authority of the Supreme Court by abolishing the independent Presidency and the Supreme Court’s right of judicial review; making all judges and other state officials recallable and elected only by the people through universal, equal, and direct suffrage; and expanding jury trials and state-funded legal services. As stated in the 1912 program of the Socialist Party of America, national laws should be repealed “only by an act of Congress or by a referendum vote of the whole people.” We could learn a thing or two from the brave Parisian Communards; as Marx explained, “The judicial functionaries [in the Paris Commune] were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subservient to all succeeding governments to which, in turn, they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable.”

Clarence Thomas isn’t the problem. The Supreme Court, as the ProPublica report states, is “left almost entirely to police itself.”

The solution is not to put a different person in a position of power. Nor, however, is it to immediately eliminate all division of labor and positions of authority under the assumption that power inevitably begets tyranny. Instead, the working class needs a state in which it can hold officials accountable.

This seesaw paradigm is worn out. A benevolent master is still a master. Freedom granted by an unaccountable force is no freedom at all. It makes no difference if Justices take kickbacks from conservative friends or liberal friends, if those friends happened to collect Nazi memorabilia or miniature statues of Mother Teresa – or if they take kickbacks at all! Even the most honest and law-abiding master is still a master.

Last May, Thomas expressed indignation over leaked documents showing the court was poised to overturn Roe v. Wade. Thomas described the leaks as an "unthinkable break of trust" jeopardizing the entire Court. Said Thomas: "I wonder how long we're going to have these institutions at the rate we're undermining them." Thomas is correct, though not in the way he intends: given the events of the past 12 months – let alone the past 233 years – one does wonder how much longer Americans will allow themselves to stay yoked to the authority of the Supreme Court.

Leaked state secrets

Speaking of honesty, breaking the law, and leaked documents: on Thursday, April 13, a National Guardsman in shorts and a T-shirt was arrested by enough cop-soldiers to wage a small war for allegedly leaking Pentagon documents on Discord.

Far more interesting than the identity of the alleged leaker is what the documents reveal and who helped betray the source. Four things are clear: there is no freedom of the mainstream press in the United States – not when the paper of record, the New York Times, works hand in glove with State funded and Intelligence Agency-connected sources like Bellingcat; the Biden administration has been intentionally overstating the possibility of a Ukrainian victory in Russia; the U.S. spies on several ally countries such as Israel and South Korea (Israel also has an extensive network within the United States: unbeknownst to the American public, the real "threat" to the 2016 elections was not Russia but Israeli agents); and an entire shadow state exists outside of public view, let alone public accountability. The leaked files come from a veritable alphabet soup of secret agencies, such as the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

There have been several high-profile leaks over the past 15 years. In 2010, Chelsea Manning leaked state secrets about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan – crimes for which the real perpetrators will likely never be punished. Among the leaks was a video, dubbed "Collateral Murder" by Wikileaks, showing a U.S. Apache helicopter crew murdering civilians and journalists. In 2013, Edward Snowden leaked state secrets detailing the National Security Administration's global surveillance system.

In each case, the leaker was punished for revealing unlawful acts by federal agencies because such revelations damaged the domestic and international credibility of the U.S. empire. Manning was held in solitary confinement (a form of torture as defined by the United Nations) and denied access to a regimen of estrogen and anti-androgen drugs. In 2020, she attempted suicide after being jailed for refusing to testify against Jullian Assange. Edward Snowden lives in exile in Russia and faces decades in prison if he returns to the United States. In 2019, Assange was arrested inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. The British government's promise to Ecuador that Assange would not be extradited to a country where he would be tortured is laughable. The only country Assange would be extradited to is the United States, and prisoner conditions in this country routinely amount to cruel and unusual punishment. Assange's punishment is ongoing, thanks in no small part to the British state, which is ultimately at the beck and call of the United States.

The Espionage Act is a perfect example of the various anti-democratic loopholes built into the existing constitutional regime, a trick Marx observed in the constitutions emerging after the failed revolutions of 1848. As Marx noted, these less-than-democratic documents allowed various freedoms except when deemed dangerous to the existence of a ruling minority. "In order to protect the 'constitutional liberty' of presidents, burgomasters, [and] police chiefs," wrote Marx, "... in order to protect the 'constitutional liberty' of this elite of the nation, all the rest of the nation must let its constitutional liberties, up to and including personal liberty, die a bloody death as a sacrifice on the altar of the fatherland." According to Hal Draper, Marx and Engels believed that if the expression of democratic rights endangered the government, then "so much the worst for the government."

Each glimpse at the inner workings of the state allows us to consider the meaning of state secrets and how much of the political apparatus exists not only outside of the democratic control of the population but outside of our entire conception of the world. As Mike Macnair explains, "Regimes of official secrecy and lying [a perfect description of the US government] make public information the private property of the individual state bureaucrats whose secrecy is protected." What's the alternative to a state that stands over us – a state that, in

the words of Marx, feeds like a “parasite” upon the social body and “clogs” all free movement?

Throughout 1917, the Bolsheviks won the hearts and minds of the workers’ and peasants’ Soviets with demands for the provisional government to publish the Tsar’s secret wartime treaties (one such treaty was the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement dividing the Middle East between France and Britain). In The Civil War in France, Marx praised the structural transparency of the Communard’s democratic republic, writing that “The whole sham of state-mysteries and state pretensions was done away [with] by a Commune, mostly consisting of simple working men…filling all the posts hitherto divided between Government, police, and Prefecture, doing their work publicly, simply, under the most difficult and complicated circumstances, and doing it, as Milton did his Paradise Lost, for a few pounds, acting in bright daylight, with no pretensions to infallibility…”

The democratic republic would realize Marx’s praise for the Commune: all state secrets would be published, state officials would do their work in full view of the public, and war would be waged only by popular vote. The working class would receive universal military training and full democratic rights would be granted to soldiers. The litmus test for any workers’ state is the composition of the armed forces; only when the standing army is fully dissolved and a people’s militia stands in its place can the state be called a democratic republic.

Our Task

The demand for a democratic republic is a challenge to sections of the existing left who equate democracy with so-called bourgeois democracy, or who claim that Marxism and socialism are somehow above democracy. Our claim that the democratic republic is the necessary form of workers’ state power – and is therefore not the same as a bourgeois republic – is profoundly unoriginal. Over a century ago, Engels explained that “If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown.” Leaving Engels aside, we can conclude that the democratic republic is not a bourgeois republic by examining the structure (both realized and imagined) of the Paris Commune – the democratic republic par excellence.

Dismissing struggles for democracy as naive or bourgeois paralyzes the left and keeps it marred in isolation and irrelevance. We don’t need more abstract phrase mongering; the demand for a democratic constitution and republic is far more concrete and substantive than slogans of “anti-capitalist resistance,” “breaking with capitalism,” and “smashing the state.” The social democratic maxim garnered from Engels and repeated by Karl Kautsky – democracy is the “light and air” of the working class – is as relevant in 21st-century America under the Constitution of the United States as it was in 18th and 19th-century Germany under the Constitution of the German Empire. Our task is not to dismiss democracy as insufficiently radical but to expose the fact that we don’t have democracy, that the working class needs it to reach socialism, and that no other social force but the united working class struggling for state power can get it.

For those concerned that each sentence must reference the ‘revolution,’ fear not. The struggle for a democratic republic will be revolutionary. For those who search for “non-reformist reforms,” look no further. We’d be naive to assume the existing state would offer no resistance when the masses attempt to eliminate the Senate, abolish the standing army, and write a new constitution. All revolutionary periods are chaotic and only semi-predictable through a thorough study of history. But most importantly (lest we let an infatuation with insurrection overshadow the primary objective), creating a democratic constitution and a democratic republic would be a political revolution, and only from that position could we continue struggling to make the revolution a social one, too.

The demand for a democratic republic is also a challenge to those on the left who do not want to break with the Constitution – either in the name of defending the Bill of Rights and what limited freedoms currently exist, maintaining a People’s Front against the “extreme right,” or because the working class is not currently demanding a new constitution. To the first point: can we imagine a situation in which, after a long period of mutual struggle, suffering, and shared sacrifice, the working class writes a new constitution and does anything but expand the freedoms found in the Bill of Rights? The only way to defend the freedoms we currently have is to take the offensive. The only way to march as an effective block is to ditch all alliances with liberal politicians proven incapable of fighting for democracy.

To the second point: our job is to add an expansive political vision to the economic struggle, not to tail existing demands. Like the Russian social democrats, we set the democratic state as our horizon and support every protest against domination – even without the promise of tangible results. Furthermore, we kid ourselves if we think there already exists a unified working class making concrete demands. That unified force has to be built, and this can only be done if we stand in complete opposition to – and therefore independent from – the existing state. Complete opposition means enthusiastic treason to the Constitution.

In 1901, Lenin wrote about a group of Russian workers who were asked about their demands. Only one worker shouted that they wanted a constitution and an end to Tsarist despotism. The workers' demand, wrote Lenin, sounded out of place compared with all the other non-political demands. But soon, through the leadership of the Russian Social Democratic Party, the working class would recognize the connection between the economic struggle for better wages and the political struggle for democracy, freedom, and state power. The RSDLP did it in the early 20th century. The DSA must assist the working class in making these connections today. To be class conscious is to recognize the necessity of taking state power.

The existing state provides us with a veritable cornucopia of abuses; each must be grasped by socialists and displayed for all to see to expose the reactionary nature of our "representatives" and the ineffective (because half-hearted) nature of our so-called champions and defenders. Each abuse, scandal, and wanton display of power points to the necessity of a democratic republic. So, expose yourself, decrepit order! We echo the invectives of Lenin toward the constitutional monarchist Cadets: "What thou doest, do quickly."

The demand for a democratic republic serves as a rallying point for all those struggling for freedom from domination – be it domination embodied in the employer, the police, anti-trans politicians, or the more abstract forces of capital and the market. All people want freedom for themselves; only some people don't want it for others. The DSA has an obligation to indefatigably expose the undemocratic nature of the United States – to be the socialist political party that declares for all to hear: "The nation that holds itself out as the world's premier democracy is no democracy at all" – and to offer the democratic republic and socialism as the only viable alternative. Tailing the Democratic Party's tepid and ineffective attempts at "saving" what little democracy purportedly exists in this country is a dereliction of duty on a profound scale. So too is it a dereliction of duty to continue condemning the present without offering an alternative more concrete than "building power," "realizing socialism," or joining the Fourth (or Fifth) International.

There are two options: stand with the working class and lead the fight, or remain grounded on the reef of reformism and go down with a sinking ship. How exciting that we can play a part in building a working-class movement that struggles to free all of us from a Constitutional law and order regime akin to Marx's description of the Second Reich – a "police-guarded military despotism, embellished with parliamentary forms" – and Lenin's view of Great Britain: a "well-equipped system of flattery, lies, and fraud."

We draw inspiration from the words of Marx when he stated, "Does a people have the right to give itself a new constitution? The answer must be an unqualified 'yes!' because the constitution becomes a practical illusion the moment it ceases to be a true expression of the people's will."

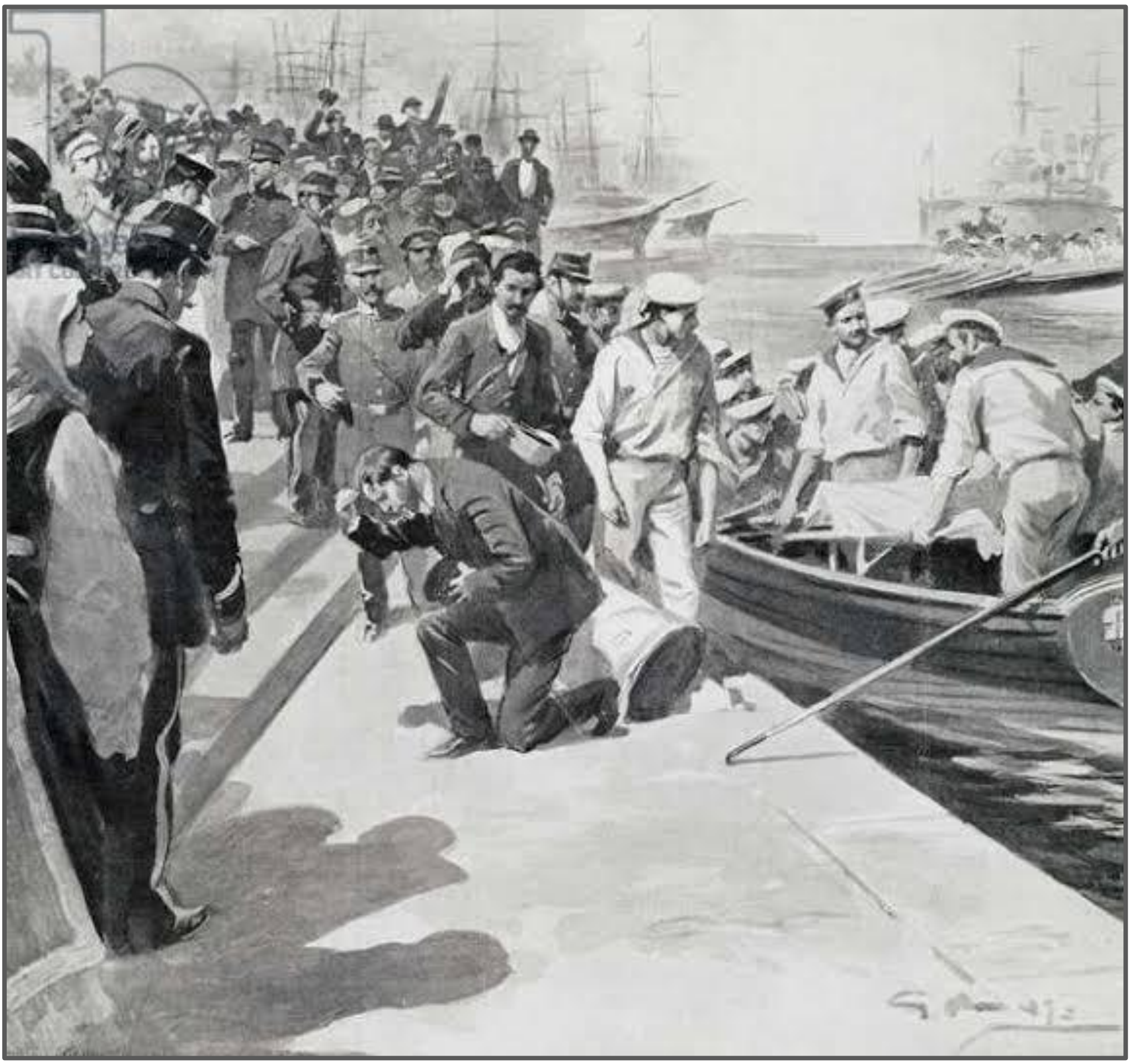
We hear our task echoed in the words of William Lloyd Garrison: "The source and parent of all the other atrocities – a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell…So perish all compromises with tyranny," bellowed the intransigent abolitionist as he publicly burned copies of the Fugitive Slave Law and the US Constitution.

We march proudly under the unimpeachable voice of Rosa Luxemburg, who opposed limiting the struggle for suffrage to the confines of the Reichstag and stated that "By pushing forward the republican character of Social Democracy we win, above all, one more opportunity to illustrate in a palpable, popular fashion our principled opposition as a class party of the proletariat to the united camp of all bourgeois parties."

Marx, Garrison, and Luxemburg stand in a long line of radicals – including the Levelers and Chartists; the American abolitionists' Vigilance Committees and radical republicans' Workingmen's Parties; the freedmen and women of the Reconstruction period in coalition with the Knights of Labor; and the majority of Second International socialism – who struggled for democracy, freedom from the domination, and an end to servitude. We have an opportunity to join them.

This article used recent headlines to scrape what amounts to only the surface of our so-called democracy. Such is the importance of Marxist Unity Group's (MUG) resolution for the 2023 DSA national convention titled 'Winning the Battle for Democracy.' If you think the ideas presented in this article are worth discussing at DSA's convention, please sign our resolution and consider sharing it with all dues-paying DSA members. Principled debate and discussion are our most effective tools in winning the existing left to the necessity of a democratic constitution, and a discussion on the convention floor is an important start.

Luke Pickerell, for Cosmonaut Magazine



Mutineers of the battleship Potemkin arrive at shore in June, 118 years ago, a crucial event in the revolution of 1905.

Gunshots in Khartoum

On 15 April, clashes began in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, pitting the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), loyal to Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the general who runs the country's governing council, against the paramilitary forces of his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, otherwise known as 'Hemedti' (little Mohamed), the Bonapartian pretender to Sudan's throne. Initially, Hemedti's militias, known as the RSF, or Rapid Support Forces, seemed to have the advantage. They took control of several airbases and installed themselves in Khartoum's residential areas, auguring a difficult campaign of urban warfare for Burhan. By the end of 16 April, however, the SAF's superior weaponry was telling, with fighter jets strafing RSF barracks and dislodging the paramilitary force from positions around the city. Much about the situation remains uncertain, even for those on the ground. All I can tell you, one friend wrote to me, is where the smoke is coming from. Unlike during the coup d'état of October 2021, the internet is still working, yet it has brought little clarity. The facts are concealed by claims and counterclaims, all delivered via Facebook posts.

What is clear is why this confrontation erupted. Tensions between the two sides had been mounting since the signing of an accord in December 2022, the so-called Framework Agreement, which was supposed to pave the way for a transition to a civilian-led government and the departure of the military junta that had ruled Sudan since October 2021. The agreement kicked all the difficult issues into the long grass. Crucially, it did not address the integration of the RSF into the army – a development that Burhan wishes to take two years, and Hemedti, ten. The political process it initiated had the rare distinction of being both extremely vague and entirely unrealistic. Delicate compromises that would have taken months to achieve were expected within weeks, according to a timetable largely created for international consumption. These demands heightened latent tensions between the two sides, prompting the RSF to believe that Egypt – a longstanding backer of the Sudanese military – would intervene. Hemedti deployed his forces next to the Merowe airforce base at the beginning of Ramadan, providing the catalyst for the current clashes.

To understand the roots of the struggle between the army and the RSF, one must go back to the formation of the Sudanese state. Sudan's first civil war began in 1955, the year before its independence from the British Empire. Postcolonial strife followed the lineaments of colonial rule, with a riparian elite in Khartoum and its satellite cities, dominated by a few families, fighting against the multi-ethnic peripheries of the country, which they exploited for labour and resources. One civil war (1955-1972) was soon followed by another (1983-2005). In the 1980s, a debt crisis almost bankrupted Sudan, and Khartoum struggled to pay for its army, while the conflict continued at the country's margins, largely in the south.

From these unpromising foundations, Omar al-Bashir, then an army brigadier who took power in a coup d'état in 1989, forged an enduring form of rule. Rather than providing services in the peripheries, he used militias to wage a counterinsurgency on the cheap, setting Sudan's many ethnic groups against each other. He privatized the state, carving it up into fiefdoms ruled by his security services, which he multiplied and fragmented in order to coup-proof his regime. The Sudanese army was soon competing with the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), and later had to contend with Hemedti's RSF, to name only a few of the security organs. Each of these forces built up its own economic empire. The Sudanese military ran construction firms, mining services, and banks, while the RSF took control of gold mining and lucrative mercenary services.

Bashir made a Faustian pact with Sudan's cities: accept terror in the country's margins in exchange for cheap commodities and subsidies for fuel and wheat, whose import required foreign currency obtained from the sale of resources produced in the peripheries. Oil had begun to flow in 1999, largely from southern Sudan. Income from its sale subsidized urban consumption and greased the wheels of a transactional machine with Bashir at its centre, acting as fixer-in-chief for an unwieldy coalition of security services and politicians. Were the margins able to control their own resources, this machine would inevitably grind to a halt. Thus, their interests were structurally opposed to those of the centre – a class relation articulated as a geographical antagonism.

In 2003, as the war in southern Sudan was coming to an end, a new war in Darfur broke out. Bashir decided to repeat the trick he had used in the south – where militia forces had fought against a southern rebel force – and arm Darfur's Arab communities to fight non-Arab rebels. Nicknamed the 'Janjaweed' (the evil horsemen), these militias quickly metastasized into a force of tens of thousands, which waged a vicious war against Darfuri rebels and civilians alike. This was the war that would make Hemedti. A camel-trader from the small Mahariya tribe of the Rizeigat Arabs, which live in both Chad and Darfur, he became a war chief, quickly assembling a force of 400 men. In 2007, he briefly became a rebel, but only in order to leverage violence for a better position in the government. Five years later, with Bashir's control of the Janjaweed faltering, Hemedti presented himself as the man who could fight Sudan's rebellions as the head of the newly created RSF, which absorbed much of the Janjaweed.

Hemedti grew close to Bashir, and quickly became his chosen enforcer. It's said that Bashir became so fond of Hemedti he affectionately called him 'Himyati' (my protector). Yet while Hemedti inflicted a series of defeats on Darfur's rebel movements, Bashir's regime was struggling. In 2005, under international pressure, the Sudanese government signed a peace agreement with southern rebels, with the promise of a southern referendum on independence. In 2011, South Sudan voted to secede, depriving Khartoum of 75% of its oil revenue. Without dollar liquidity, Bashir's transactional machine started to seize up.

The regime tried to diversify its economic base by selling land to the Gulf states and getting into gold mining. Hemedti led the way. He used his position as the head of the RSF to build up an economic empire, founding a holding company called al-Jineid and taking over Sudan's most lucrative gold mine. Like all great entrepreneurs of violence, Hemedti soon expanded his interests – sending RSF forces as mercenaries to fight against the Houthis in Yemen on the Emirati payroll. He also became involved in organizing migrant passage in the Sahel: first by stopping migrants crossing the country (an enterprise once funded by the EU), and then by forcing the same migrants to buy their freedom. By 2018, Hemedti was running a business empire that included real estate and steel production, and had built up a patronage network that rivalled Bashir's. Few in the centre were happy. For the riparian political elite and the Sudanese army alike, Hemedti was an uneducated usurper from the peripheries. Though he was an Arab, he didn't come from the narrow coterie of families that had long ruled Sudan, and his economic empire was a direct threat to Sudanese military dominance.

Despite Bashir's efforts to find alternative sources of foreign currency, by 2018, the economy was in a terminal nose-dive. In desperation, the dictator cut subsidies on wheat and fuel, breaking his pact with Sudan's cities. Protests began in the peripheries and quickly spread across the country. The Sudan Professionals Association (SPA), an umbrella group of white-collar trade unions, led the way, and soon began calling for his resignation. By January, it had joined with a loose coalition of opposition political parties in a grouping called the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC).

Protests in Khartoum were organized by a number of resistance committees and had a carnivalesque atmosphere, offering mutual aid and free healthcare in an explicit rebuke to the violence and repression of the regime. As the revolt intensified, Bashir's backers in the Gulf prevaricated and the military became increasingly uneasy. It was one thing to kill people in the peripheries, quite another to mow down the urban youth of Khartoum, many of whom came from the soldiers' own families. On 10 April 2019, Bashir allegedly gave an order to open fire on the sit-in. Hemedti claims he refused this order, and by the next day, Bashir was gone.

The security services hoped that by deposing Bashir, they could conserve control of their own economic empires. For a moment, the soldiers were heroes, and Hemedti even found some popular support in Khartoum, a city that has always thought of him as an outsider. But it was only a moment. The protesters wanted a civilian government, not a new military dictator, and rather than disperse, they staged a sit-in in front of the military headquarters in Khartoum. The security services played for time and hoped they could wear down the protesters, but as the months dragged on, the military became alarmed, and the SAF and the RSF would find common cause in repressing civilian unrest.

Early on the morning of 3 June, the security services, including the RSF, attempted to disband the sit-in. By the end of the day, approximately 200 protesters were dead and some 900 injured. Nevertheless, the protests continued. On 30 June, the thirtieth anniversary of Bashir coming to power, a million people marched against the junta. Yet the opposition's political leadership were divided over how to proceed. Many resistance committees thought that the 3 June massacre had destroyed the army's credibility, and that the time was right to prepare for a general strike to push them out of power. But the FFC opened negotiations with the military – which was under pressure from the US and Britain, via Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to enter into a transitional government with civilians. On 1 July, the SPA announced plans for two weeks of protests leading to a general strike. A few days later, the FFC announced a verbal agreement with the military, and the SPA changed course.

The agreements that were finally signed in August 2019 brought the FFC into a transitional government with the military, but they deferred Sudan's most substantive

issues, which were to be resolved in the distant future. Elections would be held in 2022, and until then the country would be ruled by a sovereign council composed of military officers and civilian politicians, with Burhan at its head and Hemedti as his deputy, overseeing a technocratic cabinet led by the former-UN economist Abdalla Hamdok.

Belatedly, the West became interested in Sudan's struggle for independence. At stake was regional realignment – Sudan was to normalize relations with Israel – and the reformation of the national economy. To listen to the diplomats and World Bank officials that invaded Khartoum's air-conditioned cafes after the revolution was to regress to the End of History. For them, a democratic utopia would emerge through austerity and the elimination of subsidies. Hamdok's cabinet were early converts to this doctrine, even if it meant riding roughshod over the socio-economic goals of the revolution that had toppled Bashir. Upon taking office, the first Minister of Finance, Ibrahim Elbadawi – a World Bank alum – announced that the aim of the revolution was to free the country from its debt crisis by cutting subsidies.

Many of the FFC's actions seemed designed to appeal to an international audience, and the organization was otherwise stymied in its domestic agenda by a military establishment that, far from disbanding the economic engine of the old regime, was intent on picking it over for scraps. Military finance fell outside the purview of the civilian part of the government, and security sector reform never got started. Hemedti continued to increase his military and economic power: the RSF recruited across the country, and not simply in Darfur, leading some of his supporters to claim that it was his paramilitaries, rather than the SAF, that constituted Sudan's real armed forces.

Hemedti also took the lead in dealing with the peripheries. The August 2019 agreement had sidelined the Sudan Revolutionary Front, a grouping of many of the armed rebels from the country's margins. Once again, power had been hoarded by the centre. For this reason, some rebel commanders saw the FFC as merely the latest iteration of riparian rule, and hoped that while Hemedti had inflicted grievous defeats on them during the previous decade, he might be someone with whom they could do business. While it was the civilian government that formally took the lead in subsequent negotiations with the rebels, Hemedti exercised informal control over the process. In October 2020, a deal was signed between the transitional government and the rebels that guaranteed them seats in government and promised greater political devolution. In the end, almost none of the agreement's more ambitious measures were implemented. Instead, the rebels' integration into the Khartoum government allowed Hemedti to use Bashir's playbook – fragmenting opposition forces and setting them against each other – against his rivals. From October 2020 onward, Hemedti used the rebels to split the centre.

At this point, public frustration with Hamdok's government was growing, with some protesters calling for his resignation and the military heightening the pressure. The rebels, now incorporated into the government, organized Potemkin protests outside the military headquarters, mimicking those that had led to the fall of Bashir. They claimed that Hamdok's government had lost its way: it was only interested in the centre, not in justice for Darfur or in changing the geographical inequalities that had long blighted the country. There was much truth to this rhetoric, but beneath it lay a different political motivation – to destabilize the country and lay the groundwork for a coup.

That coup, long predicted, came as a shock only to the apparatchiks of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, who never imagined that the military could willingly forgo the international investment that would dry up in the event of a power grab. Burhan and Hemedti, promised funds from the Gulf, had no such hesitations. On 25 October, Burhan thanked Hamdok for his service and then declared a state of emergency. International commentators bewailed a season of coups, and placed Sudan in a motley line-up next to Myanmar, Mali and Guinea. But in truth, Sudan's coup was never going to usher in a military dictatorship in the Egyptian mould. Unlike Bashir's regime, which had ruled with the assistance of Sudan's Islamists, at least for the first decade, Burhan's junta had no ideology and no real social base. Their takeover was effectively a negotiating move, designed to push Hamdok back into government with a weakened cabinet while preserving the military's powerbase.

Hamdok duly returned to office a month after the coup, only to resign amid continued street protests six weeks later. By October 2022, it was clear the military regime was flailing. The Gulf had failed to deliver on its financial promises to the junta, inflation and hunger were spiralling, and there was no let-up in public demonstrations. The coup proved that the basic antagonism of the Sudanese revolution remained intact. On one side was Bashir's security council (only nominally transformed in the absence of Bashir himself). On the other, with the FFC sidelined, were the urban citizens of Sudan, wedded to civilian rule and represented by the various resistance committees.

For the Americans and British, the military were not going anywhere, so realism required a new civilian-military transitional government. In diplomatic circles, Burhan isn't considered an Islamist, and is therefore someone whom the West can tolerate. For its part, the junta reckoned the best way to preserve the coup was to end it

and form a new transitional government, on which the military could subsequently blame Sudan's deepening economic woes. This was the background to the Framework Agreement, signed on 5 December 2022, which brought together some of the FFC and some of the Sudanese political parties in a new government with the military. UN officials and Western diplomats pronounced their satisfaction – while, throughout Sudan, the deal was met with protests.

Yet again, the agreement refused to face up to the country's most pressing issues. The dynamics of the security sector, the place of the RSF, and the role of the military in government were all left to Phase II, which was given the absurdly short time-frame of one month. The deal foregrounded Hemedti, who was at pains to criticize the coup, and attempted to position himself closer to the civilian FFC. This worried Egypt, which feared the marginalization of the SAF and so established a separate negotiating framework in Cairo, including some of the rebel groups that had joined the government prior to the coup.

With the signing of the Framework Agreement, the civilian-military opposition that had previously dominated Sudanese politics became considerably more complicated. Burhan and Hemedti began searching for both civilian and rebel support, while also looking for regional backers. This meant the reform of the security forces was almost impossible to envisage, as the country's two main military actors were increasingly at loggerheads: Egypt aligned itself with Burhan while Hemedti was in business with Russia's Wagner Group.

By March, workshops were provisionally underway on the deeper issues affecting the country's conflict, including the place of the RSF within the Sudanese military. The head of the UN mission to Sudan, Volker Perthes, announced to the UN Security Council on 20 March that he was 'encouraged by how little substantive difference there remains among the main actors.' Yet the rest of Sudan was not convinced. My friends who live in Khartoum felt that a conflict between Burhan and Hemedti had become inevitable.

And so it was. The can, kicked down the road for so long, hit a wall. Burhan expelled representatives of the RSF from a meeting on security sector reform, while the RSF started building up its forces around Khartoum in preparation for clashes. The arbitrary timetables of the diplomats, who wanted a government by the end of Ramadan, no doubt intensified these divisions. Now, as fighting enters its third day, there is little chance of a ceasefire in the immediate future. The rhetoric of both men is bellicose. For Hemedti, this is in all probability his first and only shot at rule. If he is defeated, and the RSF is dissolved into the army, his support base will be eroded and the dissolution of his economic empire will follow. For Burhan, backed by Egypt, there remain more options for negotiations, but the depth of rancour felt by the army against the Darfuri upstart should not be underestimated. Despite the SAF's strength – and Egyptian support – it is unlikely to be an easy battle. The RSF are embedded in the civilian areas of Khartoum, and some of the most deadly fighting has already occurred in Darfur, on Hemedti's home turf.

Whatever the outcome of the conflict – and the likelihood is that it will lead to a devastating loss of life – it will mark a new era for Sudan. The three previous civil wars were fought in the peripheries, and preserved the geographically-inflected class relations associated with Bashir. By contrast, this civil war – if that's what it becomes – is taking place in Khartoum and its satellite cities. Hemedti, who came to prominence through Bashir's transactional politics and his instrumentalization of militias, now has a political life of his own. His outsider status is a challenge to Sudan's riparian elitism – one that is playing out in the streets and skies of its urban spaces.

Joshua Craze, for Sidebar

Fictitious Capital and the Transition out of Capitalism

The following is a "thought experiment" which attempts to see fictitious capital in relation to the end of capitalism. By pursuing the concept of fictitious capital as far as we can, by illuminating the unbelievable distortions it has fomented in what is called "economic development" on a world scale, we can highlight the nature of contemporary struggles as well as explain why there are not more struggles. We can also address the reasons why a "society beyond capitalism" seems such a remote possibility at present.

In discussing fictitious capital, we must never forget that it is subordinate to, and derivative from, capital generally. It is important not to foment the illusion that the struggle is against "fictitious capital", leaving "real" capital itself unexamined. But at the same time, it is indispensable to sort out the fictitious dimension of the contemporary economy, if only conceptually. Many people today, including people on the radical left, regard contemporary capitalism as functioning normally, more or less the way it always has. I could not disagree more. Perhaps, as contemporary ideologies assert, capitalism has "reinvented" or is "reinventing" itself, as it has done several times in the past. Be that as it may, the post-1973 period presents one of the strangest, if not the strangest phases in the history of capitalism.

What, then, is fictitious capital?

Fictitious capital is, on first approach, paper claims on wealth (in the form of profit, interest and ground rent) in excess of the total available surplus value, plus available loot from primitive accumulation.

There is $33 trillion in outstanding debt (Federal, state, local, corporate, personal) in the U.S. economy, three times GDP. (No one knows how much is tied up in the international hedge funds and derivatives.) The state (including Federal, state and local levels) consumes 40% of GDP. The net U.S. debt abroad is $3 trillion ($11 trillion held by foreigners minus $8 trillion in U.S. assets abroad) That amount is growing by $500 billion a year at current rates. Foreigners hold an increasing percent of U.S. government debt; the four major Asian central banks (Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan) alone hold over $1 trillion. It is the Federal government's debt which makes possible the reflationary actions of the Federal Reserve Bank. If Doug Noland's notion of "financial arbitrage capitalism" is right, the old conceptualization of the role of the banking system and the Fed's (apparent) ability to expand and contract credit availability through it, is superceded; increasing amounts of "virtual" credit are created by "securitized finance" independent of banks. One must also consider the government-linked entities (Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae), which backed the reflation of mortgages of the past 4 years, leading to an incredible housing bubble. This entire edifice depends on 1) low inflation in the U.S., as higher inflation would scare off foreign lenders; 2) the willingness of U.S, "consumers" to go more and more heavily into debt (with debt service now taking 14% of incomes, as opposed to 11% a few years ago) 3) the willingness and ability of foreigners to go on re-lending U.S. balance-of-payments deficits back to the U.S.

Let's shift to another level altogether: the extent of unproductive labor and unproductive consumption in the U.S. economy. Marx defines the state debt as fictitious; he defines labor performed for revenue (as opposed to capital) as unproductive. Many Marxists would agree that military expenditure performed for the revenue of the state is

unproductive labor, even if it produces a profit for an individual capitalist. One can extend that paradigm, I think, much farther in terms of other goods and services commanded by state revenue, and/or the fictitious capital of the state debt. To be productively consumed, surplus-value that is concretely means of production (Dept. I) or means of consumption (Dept. II) must RETURN to C or V for further expanded reproduction; by that criterion, it would seem that unproductive consumption in the U.S. economy must be enormous.

Now perhaps for the most controversial point: what do individual reported corporate profits mean in such a situation? Do they really correspond to a proportional amount of surplus-value? The amount of profit from interest and ground rent relative to profit from manufacture grows every year. Even within profit of "manufacture", what does this mean when companies like GE and GM are now earning more profits from their financial departments than from production? And if a significant amount of that production (with GE, a very significant amount) is for (unproductive) capitalists' consumption (i.e. military) then what does the expanded M' that returns to each corporation as profit mean? What does it correspond to in terms of C and V in their material form that must be productively consumed in further expansion for the capital circuit to continue?

We know the countervailing tendencies that must partly subsidize the circulation of so much fictitious capital and so much capitalist's consumption: primitive accumulation (non-payment of equivalents) for goods imported from the less advanced parts of the world, for labor power recruited from Third World petty producer economies; pushing labor power below its reproductive value; using fixed capital past its replacement time; looting of nature (non-replacement of resources) or destruction of the environment as a whole.

All of this adds up to a pretty grim picture, looking like nothing so much as a vast bankruptcy subsized by foreign creditors, who would themselves be bankrupted by the contraction of the debt pyramid sustaining the whole operation. This is far bigger than the biggest Spanish bankruptcy of the 16th century in terms of its current and potential impact on the world economy.

When Marx was writing Capital the trends described above were far less prominent. Fictitious capital was pretty much destroyed with each decennial crisis; the amount of unproductive consumption in the economies he studied was nothing compared to what is has become (though it was already surprisingly widespread). I think his conceptual apparatus is still perfectly contemporary for sorting out what is what.

Historical Overview

Let us briefly review how things got to this state of affairs.

Capitalism in 1890-1914 was approaching the crisis of the British-dominated world system. While the "sterling standard" never came close to the levels of U.S. international indebtedness until the 1914-1945 "Thirty Years War" and its aftermath, British industry no longer could back up Britain's financial role under the impact of U.S. and German competition. The extended single crisis of 1914-1945 must be understood as a "substitute depression", (punctuated by an actual depression from 1929 to ca. 1938) in which the classic bankruptcy proceedings were carried out on British capital's world hegemony. Germany and the U.S. battled for the spoils; the U.S. won.

But "underneath" the financial and geopolitical transformation of that period — one still the basis of current world arrangements — a more fundamental transformation was occurring, namely the passage of world capitalism from its phase of "formal domination", with a preponderance of absolute surplus value based on the lengthening of the working day, to its phase of "real domination", based on technological intensification of the labor process. This was accompanied by a revolution in agricultural productivity and transportation costs which reduced the cost of food in the average worker's consumption from 50% (in the mid-19th century) to a far smaller share, thereby opening the way to "mass consumer durables" which came on stream in the 1920's, symbolized first of all by the automobile.

This "automobile-oil-steel-rubber" complex of production and consumption was the heart of the world capitalist boom from 1945 to 1975. Beyond the immediate process of production, the automobile-centered economy had a huge impact on the development of cities, suburbs (and ultimately exurbs), hence of real estate, construction (including highways), and all the sectors that feed into construction, not to mention the environmental impact. Mass public transportation in countries such

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as the U.S. was gutted in the interests of this economy. Necessary travel time to and from work was significantly increased. Working-class urban culture, and public life, was weakened by the flight to the suburbs.

Fictitious capital played an important role in the 1945-1975 boom phase, though still small by comparison with the role it has played since. U.S. government debt coming out of World War II was $250 billion, roughly 110% of GDP in 1945 dollars. (Today it is conservatively estimated at $11 trillion, or three times GDP.) The postwar arrangements that established the IMF, World Bank, GATT (predecessor to the WTO), and the Marshall Plan (cf. Michael Hudson's Super Imperialism, 2nd ed. 2002) cannot concern us here. But the dismantling of the British and French empires and the subordination of Europe and Japan to U.S. hegemony created the global "economy of scale" necessary to accommodate the new productive forces that had been building up during the 1890-1945 period, setting the stage for the longest boom in capitalist history, based on a new standard of value expressing the increased average social productivity of labor. The reconstruction costs from World War II in Europe and Asia, however, and the role of the U.S. in providing needed liquidity for both reconstruction and the later impressive development of Japan, Germany, France, and Italy largely concealed the problem of fictitious capital from view until the system began to sputter after 1958, and headed into real crisis after 1968 (March 1968 closing of foreign exchange markets), becoming official in 1970 (Penn Central bankruptcy and liquidity crisis), 1971 (U.S. tears up Bretton Woods) and 1973 (final collapse of fixed exchange rates and emergence of an outright dollar standard, closely related oil crisis).

Theoretical Intermezzo

Where does fictitious capital originate? It is not discussed in the "pure capitalist" model of vols. I and II of Marx's Capital, centered for the most part on the single enterprise and the "immediate process of production", what Marx (at the end of vol. II) calls the "abstract" mode of presentation. It is introduced in a brief chapter in the middle sections of vol. III, and in scattered references to the fictitious nature of the state debt, etc.

Fictitious capital is also absent from the Byzantine academic debates, based on the first section of vol. III, about the so-called "transformation problem" (values into prices) and the rate of profit, a debate which abstracts entirely from the problematic set out above and specifically from Marx's repeated admonition that

> "Accumulation requires the transformation of a portion of the surplus product into capital. But we cannot, except by a miracle, transform into capital anything but such articles as can be employed in the labor process (i.e. means of production), and such further articles as are suitable for the sustenance of the worker (i.e. means of subsistence)."

This means that profits derived from such sectors as luxury goods and military production, when arriving at the general rate of profit and hence the total surplus value available for expanded reproduction, have to be treated differently than profit from the production of machine tools and bread. They cannot continue the cycle as expanded C and V, and therefore are a net deduction from the total profit available to the capitalist class for new investment. They represent objects of consumption of the CAPITALIST class; they are revenue.

In real capitalist practice, means of production and other income-producing assets are not valued in terms of their historic costs or in terms of their current replacement cost; they are valued as a CAPITALIZATION of an expected flow of income based on the asset. Capitalization means that in a general environment in which the rate of profit is 5%, an asset producing an annual profit of $5 will be "worth" $100. "Underneath" that surface, the distribution of the average rate of profit, plus or minus the higher or lower profits going to individual firms which are above or below the average social productivity of labor, does its work, and ultimately asserts itself in crisis and recomposition. But the capitalist class, the central bank and the capitalist state do everything in their power to preserve those capitalized — fictitious — values as long as possible, even at the price of gutting the "real" economy. The actual surplus value available to the capitalist class as a whole to support those capitalized values comes not merely from the immediate process of production but also, once again, from non-replacement: the looting of nature, primitive accumulation of petty producer populations, and sometimes non-reproduction of C and V.

Thus it is possible to refine the definition of fictitious capital offered initially; it is not merely the paper claims (stocks, bonds, income from the sale and rental of land and real property) in excess of total surplus value; it is the capitalized "current value" of total income-producing assets in excess of their value, defined as the socially necessary labor time of REproducing them today. The fundamental tendency of capitalism, through increased productivity of labor, is to cheapen all commodities, including the universal commodity labor power (the source of all value), while at the same time the capitalist class, central bank and capitalist state are mobilized to

preserve existing capitalizations, at least for the class as a whole (while periodically sacrificing the weaker capitals) until they are overwhelmed by the next crisis.

We now get to the nub of the matter: has capitalism exhausted itself as a mode of production capable of expanding the material reproduction of humanity? Has capital, in Marx's formulation, become an obstacle to itself?

In the era of fictitious capital, where it is the drive to preserve existing capitalized values that dominates production rather than the expansion of production which (as in all the cycles prior to 1973) produced over time fictitious values capitalized in excess of current social costs of reproduction, (capitalized values that then, in the crisis, collapsed down to levels reflecting real costs, allowing a new cycle to begin), the classic cycle of boom-crisis-recomposition and new takeoff is deeply distorted. Instead of a 1929-style bust, capitalism since 1973 has undergone a "hidden depression", with a gradual wearing down of material reproduction under the weight of the managed mass of fictitious capital.

The fundamental question is: does this post-1973 reality express the "fact" that the socially necessary time of reproduction on a global scale can no longer serve as the "numeraire", the universal standard of exchange? Can global reproduction still be expanded in the value form? Or has global society become too productive to be contained within it? Capital since 1973 seems to be trying to recompose the relationship between surplus-value, variable and constant capital into the foundations for a new expansion, but its main result, on the global scale of social reproduction, seems to be more large-scale destruction than expansion.

The answer to the above questions is inseparable (following the Theses on Feuerbach, namely that activity is objective) from the ability of the proletariat to supersede the value form and found a new mode of production. There is always the possibility of the "mutual destruction of the contending classes" as a mode of production exhausts itself (as Marx indicated in the Communist Manifesto).

My hypothesis is that since the appearance of a communist current in the working class (1848) every "classical" crisis of the pre-1914 period (the decennial crises of 1846, 1857, then the "great depression" of 1873-1896) has been, within the "core" of the system (the most advanced production and most advanced working class) a dress rehearsal for the end of capitalism, in which the proletariat "was compelled to do" (Marx) what was necessary to dissolve its status as commoditized labor power: hence the appearance of a communist current, always a minority (1848, 1871, 1905, 1917-1921, to a lesser extent in 1968-1976). It is not an exaggeration to say that ever since 1848 every major development in capitalism (and no less true for the post-1973 period) must be understood within the framework of exorcising the "specter of communism". (It is also important to note that three of the four major historical upsurges of the proletariat occurred as a boom was peaking: the formation of the First International in the 1860's run-up to the Franco-Prussian War, the Commune, and the 1873 depression; the formation of the Third International that emerged from the worldwide strike wave which preceded World War I and which continued in 1917-1921, i.e. at the beginning of the "thirty-year crisis"; finally, the worldwide surge of 1968-1977 as the post-World War II boom was peaking. In counterpoint to this is the formation of the Second International after 1889, in the midst of the 1873-1896 "great depression" or "great deflation" as it is sometimes called.

Capital can only be understood in relationship to its inseparable historical counterpart, the proletariat, and the proletariat is historically important, not as passive "variable capital" in capitalism's balance sheet, but as an ACTIVITY that tends to constitute the "class for itself", pointing beyond the capitalist mode of production. "The working class is revolutionary or it is nothing" (Marx).

The recovery from each capitalist crisis, once again, involves a vast "recomposition": fictitious capital is wiped out through bankruptcy, fixed capital is devalorized (often below its cost of reproduction), and the new "numeraire", or standard of value, unleashes commodities cheapened by the new generalized labor productivity. The working class "bill of consumption" (V) might contract in value terms (as a percentage of the total product), yet be larger in material terms because of an overall cheapening of consumer goods. Accumulation can resume with an adequate rate of profit. Ever since 1973, world capitalism, without resort to full-blown depression or a Third World War, has been struggling to establish a new standard of value to supercede the exhausted one associated with the postwar boom. To do so, it must re-equilibrate the existing total paper claims on wealth (profit, interest, ground rent) with existing surplus value in a new, acceptable

“We now get to the nub of the matter: has capitalism exhausted itself as a mode of production capable of expanding the material reproduction of humanity? Has capital, in Marx's formulation, become an obstacle to itself?”

ate of profit, at the same time that it expands the reproduction of global society. Yet, because of the preservation of fictitious capital against devalorization, at the expense of material production, it has failed to find this new equilibrium.

It has, of course, by opening up the Soviet bloc, China, and parts of the Third World through "globalization", increased the total volume of production; it has cheapened commodities; it has innovated new technologies and increased the productivity of labor (although more slowly than in the postwar boom). By the unceasing demand for the "reform" (the Orwellian word par excellence of our time) and "flexibilization" of the wealthy, more "mercantilist" economies of Europe and East Asia, it may succeed in extending this process. But it has not undergone the "clearing of the decks" — full-scale deflation of fictitious valuations in harmony with a prevailing rate of profit in the production of commodities which can "return" as expanded C and V. On the contrary, by the devastation it has wrought and is wreaking in Latin America, Africa, eastern Europe, Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia and rural China, not to mention austerity in the U.S. and Europe, it has compelled the world's working population and relative surplus population to bear the brunt of the crisis. American world power today stands as much in opposition to a new "healthy" phase of global capitalist expansion, (assuming one is possible) as British world power did in 1900.

World Capitalism after 1973

This process is essential to understanding the post-1973 period. One can, I think, "write the history" of the post-1973 era around the efforts to prop up the growing mass of "nomad dollars" or "hot air" which brought down Bretton Woods and to postpone (for over thirty years!) the inevitable deflationary crash. More specifically: the 1975 U.S. reflation (under Ford and continued by Carter) took the world into the 1979-1980 near-inflationary blowout (gold at $850 an ounce, oil at record levels after the Iranian revolution, a threatened world flight from the dollar). This was followed by the Reagan-Volcker super-austerity: U.S. interest rates hitting 20%, leading to a massive recovery of the dollar, the latter made possible by equally massive foreign lending to the U.S., particularly in the Japanese acquisition of Treasury bills. This "wringing out" of the 1970's inflationary economy — provoking in 1981-1982 the deepest recession of the entire post-1945 period to date — set off the stock market boom of 1982-2000.

I contend that the U.S. stock market boom of the 80's and 90's was a continuation of the reflationary strategy begun in earnest with the 1968-1973 onset of crisis, a strategy which has not yet run its course (currently manifested in the mortgage refinancing boom), and which constitutes in effect the largest "Ponzi scheme" in history. This paper boom has taken place, not in conjunction with a real global expansion as in 1945-1975 (however qualified by some of the downside mentioned earlier) but large-scale DESTRUCTION on a world scale: the deindustrialization and downsizing of the U.S., extended mass unemployment in western Europe, absolute retrogression in Latin America, Africa, much of Asia, of Eastern Europe, and of the former Soviet bloc (both in Russia and Ukraine and even more so in Central Asia), and more recently for the 900 million Chinese peasants and workers left out of the "Chinese miracle". The social "balance sheet" of this paper boom is to be found in various phenomena of decay ranging from the destruction of the blue-collar world in many countries (even China has had a net loss of 22 million industrial jobs), the expansion of the parasitic FIRE (finance-insurance-real estate) sector (most recently in the preposterous world housing boom, centered once again in the U.S.), environmental destruction (most notably global warming), the growing role of international crime (e.g. the drug trade), ongoing economically-preventable epidemics, the disintegration of 60 economic basket cases into "failed states", and fundamentalism (Christian, Moslem, Jewish, Hindu). Having knocked down many of the economic "great walls of China" this circulation of fictitious dollars is apparent today in the growing pressure on Japan and Germany (in particular) to "financialize" on the Anglo-American model, with the same effect of gutting the "real" economy, particularly as it affects working people. The instability of this "dollarization" and "financialization" of the world economy has been apparent in the Japanese deflation (1990-present), U.S. recession and real estate collapse (1991), Mexican crisis (1994), the Asia crisis (1997-1998), the Russian default and collapse of LTCM (1998), the Brazil crisis (1999), the U.S. dot.com collapse (March 2000) the Argentine crisis (2001) and the 35% decline of the Dow Jones Industrial average from March 2000 to September 2002. All told, roughly $3 trillion is paper wealth was destroyed in 2000-2002. Since that time, the acceleration of "financial arbitrage capitalism" (the term is from Doug Noland, expanding on ideas of Hyman Minsky), with the mortgage refinancing boom, has preserved the "U.S. consumer" as the "buyer of last resort" in the world economy. (As one wag put it recently: "I've finally understood supply-side economics. Other countries supply the goods, and then they supply the money to buy them".)

It must also be mentioned that this circulation of fictitious capital has brought into existence new productive forces as companies compete in ever-tighter markets, expressing the pull of devalorization. In sum, on a world scale, a smaller percentage of production workers in the work force as a whole is producing a larger volume of goods, goods that have been cheapened by technological innovation. This is, as noted earlier, part of a classic pattern of capitalist crisis and recomposition. But it must equally be stressed that, in contrast to the 1945-1975 period, where expansion of the productive forces was driving the creation of fictitious capital (on a small scale compared to the present), today it is the necessity of circulating fictitious capital which is driving the development of production. The total deficits of the U.S. state from American independence to 1980 totaled $1 trillion; since 1980, that total has increased to $4 trillion. (That total does not include the "off-balance" sheet sums transferred through internal accounting from the Social Security system to smooth out the reported Federal deficit.) (It is also interesting that the post-1980 U.S. government debt is almost exactly equal to the $3 trillion net indebtedness of the U.S. The U.S. government debt is the "totem" of the world system. This difference from the historical character of earlier capitalist expansions will matter terribly when the "debt-deflation" phase hits, and capital (not to mention debt-strapped workers and other "consumers") will have to pay off enormous debts (at historic cost) with the greatly depressed current prices and wages expressing current costs of reproduction (and in reality well below the latter).

What has been presented thus far is basically a merely "economic" analysis, as critique of political economy. But to understand the weight of fictitious capital in the current context, it is necessary to look beyond the merely economic to the class struggle. Despite the colossal efforts of ideology to deny or trivialize social antagonism, everything today is shaped by class struggle, both the one-sided class struggle waged for 30 years by the capitalist class, and even more so the potential threat of a two-sided struggle to re-emerge into the open, as it has already begun to do (Argentina 2001, Bolivia 2005, ongoing working-class ferment in China, the return of the wildcat in Italy, Germany and Britain).

The classical workers' movement from ca. 1840 to 1945 was fundamental in pushing capital into the phase of "real domination", above all in the century-long struggle for the 8-hour day. It had its finest hour in the 1917-1921 period, in the Russian and German revolutions, in the Italian factory occupations, a pre-revolutionary situation in Britain (January 1919), and major strike waves in France, Spain and the U,S. But the 1917-1921 radical upsurge failed because capitalism still had a large colonial and underdeveloped world, barely under the formal domination of capital, into which to expand, as well as significant potential for recomposition (cheapened mass consumer goods) and primitive accumulation within the advanced sector itself (50% of the U.S. and French populations, for example, still lived in rural areas and small towns in 1918). The 1914-1945 "Thirty Years' War" and its immediate aftermath, through the New Deal/Keynesian welfare state (the U.S., Britain), Social Democracy (northern Europe) Stalinism and then the Third World Bonapartism that emerged from de-colonization made the classical workers' movement, expressed most succinctly in the dominant Lassallean wing of German Social Democracy part of official society. Thereafter, in a way far more visible than in the pre-1945 period, progress in class struggle came from the unofficial workers' movement, most notably the growing wildcat strike wave (above all in the U.S., Britain and France) in the 1955-1973 period. A mere listing of the high points of social polarization and struggle on a world scale captures the climate of the end of the postwar boom:

- U.S. 1968-1970 biggest (and largely wildcat) strike wave since 1946; black revolt; youth revolt; Vietnam debacle
- U.K. 1972 flying-picket strike wave
- Canada 1972 (Quebec general strike)
- France 1968 (May-June general strike)
- Germany 1969 (September strikes)
- Italy 1969-1973 "creeping May"
- Spain 1976 (strike wave at end of Franco regime)
- Portugal 1974-1975 mass strikes, factory occupations, end of fascism
- Poland 1968; 1970 (student movement, Gdansk-Gdynya shipyards' uprising)
- Czechoslovakia 1968 (some workers' councils appear under Dubcek)
- Chile 1973 (proto-dual power situation under Allende)
- Argentina 1973 (general strike)
- Uruguay 1973 (general strike)
- Brazil 1968 (strike wave against the military dictatorship)
- Mexico 1968 (student movement and bloodbath, October 1968)
- China 1966-1969 working-class independence emerges in "Cultural Revolution"

Posed more dynamically, world capitalism in 1973-1975 confronted a general "leftward" surge expressed in this ferment, and most dramatically the working-class upsurge in Spain, Portugal and the "southern cone" (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile), the "Euro-communist" advance in western Europe, "national liberation" victories in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau (contributing to a radicalization of the situation in South Africa), a "Marxist-Leninist" coup in Ethiopia, and the Stalinist victories in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. One could add to this the ephemeral (1975-1977) Third World convergence in the United Nations demanding food, oil and debt relief.

The French authors Tizon and Lonchampt are not far wrong in saying that "ca. 1976 the top political priority of every European government was heading off the outbreak of proletarian revolution".

Yet world capitalism managed to put out every one of these fires. But the post-1973 glaciation must be understood precisely as a response to that moment, in order to better see its depth and its limits.

These social and political developments are inseparable from the economic unraveling of those years. As in the wake of 1917-1921, world capitalism survived the late 1960's/early 1970's upsurges because it had further room for expansion. Once it had evolved its overall method of fictitious financialization, centered in the U.S. and to a lesser extent in the U.K., it pushed its way into the Soviet bloc, China and the semi-autarchic protected regimes of the Third World to implement its planetary leveraged buyout. The period since 1973 must be understood as one extended counter-revolution against the movements of the 1960's and 1970's. The Italian auto maker FIAT, which was plagued by mounting wildcat activity through the 1970's, spent billions to rationalize its Turin factories and decentralize to "cottage" production around Italy, and this can be seen as pretty much a paradigm for how capital responded to the crisis globally.

Counter-revolution has taken many forms: the dismantling of the old "worker fortresses" (large blue-collar concentrations), yuppies, gentrification, real estate expulsion of working people and the poor from the world capitals and many other major cities, the unhinged development of the FIRE sector, the proliferation of the euphemistically-named "creative classes" in the growth of media, NAFTA and all free-trade zones, (tantamount to corporate mergers resulting in downsizing and layoffs), the growth of income disparity on a world scale to dimensions unknown since the 1920's, the growth in the gap between "developed" and "underdeveloped" countries, just-in-time, kanben, QWL committees, worker-management cooperation, the slashing of social safety nets, flexibilization, endless calls for "labor reform", de-regulation, dumbing down of education and culture, perfect markets=perfect democracy, surveillance through the internet and most recently "anti-terrorist" legislation,

It is instructive to look, by contrast with the late 1960's/early 1970's, at struggles throughout the world in recent years. In contrast to the sketch of the earlier period, it is necessary to include some vaguely defined "inter-classist" movements (e.g. anti-globalization) and the movement against the Iraq war, in addition to strike activity.

After the isolated, losing struggles against plant closings and de-industrialization in the U.S., Britain, France, Belgium and Spain in the late 1970's and the 1980's, we see the following:

- U.S. Los Angeles riot (1992), Seattle riot (1999), anti-globalization movement, antiwar movement (2003)
- U.K. mobilization against the Iraq war (2003); some wildcats
- Anti-globalization movement: Seattle, Quebec, Prague, Goteborg, Genoa
- NGO movements against child labor; anti-logo; sweatshops
- France: antiwar movement; April-May 2003 public employees' strikes
- Germany: wildcats, mobilization against Hartz IV
- Denmark: general strike, 1998
- Italy: workers' refuse to ship Iraq war material (2003), wildcats, struggle over pensions, education
- Norway: oil workers' strikes
- Australia: longshore strike, 1998
- Mexico: Zapatistas
- Columbia: civil war
- Venezuela: mass movements pro- and anti-Chavez
- Peru: general strike, 2004
- Argentina: December 2001 insurgency
- Brazil: landless movement, public functionaries' strikes
- Bolivia: 2003, 2005 insurgencies
- Ecuador: general strikes, 1999, 2005
- Algeria: civil war, 1990's
- Nigeria: regional struggles over oil
- Ivory Coast: anti-government riots, threat of civil war
- Palestinian struggle; (Islamic fundamentalism)
- Israel: general strikes against austerity
- Uzbekistan: riots, 2005
- Kyrgyzstan: riots. 2005
- Tajikistan: fundamentalist movement
- Georgia: US-backed liberal takeover
- Serbia: US-backed liberal movement
- Ukraine: "orange revolution", 2005
- China: riots, strikes
- Indonesia: overthrow of Suharto (1998)
- Korea: general strike, 1997
- Taiwan: some labor actions
- Nepal: Maoist guerrilla insurgency

Further, Islamic fundamentalism and some terrorism, right-wing populist movements (some, as in Austria, Switzerland, France and Belgium with a significant working-class base) must also be considered struggles after a fashion against globalization (struggles having nothing in common with a radical left perspective). One thing leaps out, in contrast to the earlier period: social issues such as the pensions crisis, globalization, the environment, immigration and anti-immigrant mobilization, international criminal activity (e.g. the Mexican drug gangs active in the U.S.), have impinged on the working class as much if not more as the issues of the

earlier period (e.g. speedup) supra-national trade areas (EU, NAFTA, CAFTA). In North America and western Europe, most working-class struggles of the past 25 years have been defensive, whether at the point of production, or in reproduction, in the battle over the creation of the "lean and mean" state (social benefit cutbacks, in welfare, unemployment benefits, health care, pensions and retirement, environmental controls, health and safety legislation, or the gutting of education).

Program: The Determinate Negation of the Existent or the Future in the Present

Most discussion of the program on the radical left (in all its Marxist, libertarian and anarchist variants) focuses on the important question of the forms of working class rule: workers' councils, soviets, or a political party or parties. One must of course add to this the Trotskyist transitional program, a program to be raised in capitalism on the way to revolution, understood as soviets plus the vanguard party. Few if any of these discussions look at the material reproduction (or non-reproduction) of society under capitalism, or after capitalism. The following, then, can be understood as mainly the material "content" of the forms that have been discussed ad nauseam in the past 40 years.

I propose to use the following "heuristic" device to explore fictitious capital in the world economy: imagine world production from the vantage point of a world soviet after successful world working-class revolution.

I think that the main reason for the eclipse of the type of struggles dominant in the 1960/s and 1970's and the relative absence of such struggles today is the globalization of the stakes. There is no meaningful reformism on the level of society as a whole (in contrast to specific local and defensive struggles that can have temporary victories). That is why the word "reform" is now the slogan of reaction. If, as Marx said in 1844 "in France, it is enough to want to be something to want to be everything", today in order to be something it is necessary to become everything.

The following offers nothing more than the bare bones of a program for the expanded material reproduction of society; it does not begin to discuss the equally if not more fundamental transformation of life, the "development of human powers as its own goal" that would be the essence of an actually communist society.

The old "imagination" of working-class revolution was a general strike or mass strike, occupation of the factories, establishment of workers' councils and soviets, the political overthrow of the capitalist class, and henceforth a direct democratic management of socialized production. This "imagination" was based on the experiences of the Russian, German, Spanish and Hungarian revolutions and revitalized by the French May-June strike of 1968.

I think this model has lost touch with contemporary reality because capital-intensive technological development, downsizing and outsourcing has reduced the "immediate process of production" to a relatively small part of the total work force (not to mention total population), and even the production workers who remain are often involved in making things (e.g. armaments) that would have no place in a society beyond capitalism. More contemporary workplaces would be abolished by a successful revolution than would be placed under "workers' control".

On a world scale, the total number of production workers, as a percentage of the capitalist population (wage-laborers and capitalists), has been shrinking even as the total global "output" has grown.

As I said, a heuristic device, but perhaps a useful one.

The first task of such a soviet would be to organize the global transition out of the production of value (in Marx's sense of value). The world revolution will have presumably taken place when the ratio of C (constant capital) to V (variable capital), the organic composition of capital, is already very high, meaning that value is already obsolete. But what is the basis of value? It is the social cost of reproducing the existing productive work force of the two departments I and II. The revolution would accelerate the development of the productive forces on a global scale to truly free production and reproduction from the value form.

What we need is a basic grasp of the total resources available on a world scale, in terms of existing labor power and means of production, to effect such a transition. The cost of reproducing world society in today's terms is the "foundation" of a measure of "fictitious capital". Here the is the minimum, "first 100 days" program:

1. abolition of the dollar standard, etc. and an "organized deflation" of the world economy
2. abolition of all socially unnecessary and noxious labor
3. retraining of the work force freed by II.
4. global expansion to uplift world population to an acceptable worldwide standard of living
5. shortening of the working day
6. transition out of the automobile/steel/oil economy; dismantling of the urban/suburban/exurban sprawl produced by the needs of that economy;

Tentative Final Remarks

Here are further programmatic points, offering more detail within the above framework, for this victorious world soviet, very tentative. They amount to "Chapter 11" bankruptcy proceedings for the capitalist system.

In abolishing fictitious capital, we impose "global accounting standards" or "world resource accounting" to take an "inventory" of total existing means of production and labor power, in terms of use values (The goal is pushing all production beyond the necessity of exchange, so that social "measurement" occurs neither in price nor in labor-time but is strictly in use-value terms of real goods and services produced.)

1. implementation of a program of technology export to equalize upward the Third World.
2. creation of a minimum threshold of world income.
3. dismantling of the oil-auto-steel complex, shifting to mass transport and trains.
4. abolish the bloated sector of the military; police; state bureaucracy; corporate bureaucracy; prisons; FIRE; (finance-insurance-real estate); security guards; intelligence services.
5. taking the labor power freed by this to begin retraining and reeducation around real needs.
6. crash programs around energy: nuclear fusion power, solar, wind, etc.
7. application of the "more is less" principle to as much as possible. (examples: satellite phones supersede land-line technology in the Third World, cheap CDs supersede expensive stereo systems, etc.)
8. a concerted world agrarian program aimed at using food resources of the US, Canada, Europe and developing Third World agriculture.
9. integration of industrial and agricultural production, and the breakup of megalopolitan concentration of population. This implies the abolition of suburbia and exurbia, and radical transformation of cities. The implications of this for energy consumption are profound.
10. automation of all drudgery that can be automated.
11. generalization of access to computers and education for full working-class participation in global and regional planning.
12. free health and dental care.
13. integration of education with production.
14. the shift of R+D currently connected with the unproductive sector into productive use
15. the great increase in productivity of labor makes as many basic goods free as possible, thereby freeing all workers (e.g. cashiers, etc.) involved in collecting money and accounting for it.
16. global shortening of work week.
17. centralization of everything that must be centralized (e.g use of world resources) and decentralization that everything that can be decentralized (e.g control of labor process within the general framework)
18. measures to deal with the atmosphere, most importantly the phasing out of fossil fuel use.

Once again, in conclusion, the usefulness of such a basic program, much of which can be quickly implemented by working-class power, is that is cuts through the appearances of the deep distortions of fictitious development since at least World War II. It cuts through the debates about "forms of organization" (party, class, councils, soviets). We don't want soviets and workers' councils in finance, insurance, real estate, and many of the other sectors mentioned which exist only because the system is capitalist; we want to abolish those sectors.

Loren Goldner

The Class Struggle in France

Let's cut straight to the heart of the matter: following the large demonstrations against pension "reforms," President Macron decided to "force his way" by bypassing parliament and imposing a sovereign decision to adopt a law raising the retirement age from 62 to 64. In the demonstrations, the immediate response has been to say that "we, too, are forcing our way." Between two opposed wills — in this case, the sovereign will of the State-Capital machine and the will of the [working] class — it is force that decides. The labor-capital compromise has been broken since the 1970s, but the financial crisis and the war have further radicalized the conditions of the confrontation.

Let us try, then, to analyze the two poles of this power relation, which is based on force, in the political conditions between 2008 and 2022.

The French March

The movement appears to have grasped the political phase change that was provoked, first and foremost, by the 2008 financial crisis and, subsequently, by the war. It has made use of several forms of struggle developed by the French proletariat over the course of the last few years, bringing them together, articulating them, and, in so doing, legitimizing their differences. Trade union struggles, with their peaceful marches, have gradually been transformed through the integration of un-waged participants (on March 23, for example, the presence of youth, university and high school students was massive), who have initiated multiple days of "wildcat" [sauvage] demonstrations that took off at dusk into the streets of Paris and other big cities (where they were even more intense).

This strategy of group-action, which moves constantly from one part of the city to another, lighting fires as it goes, is clearly inherited from the Gilets Jaunes. Instead of peacefully parading between République and Nation, the latter opted to begin "terrorizing" the bourgeoisie, bringing "fire" to the wealthy neighborhoods in the West of Paris. On the night of March 23, 2023, 923 fires were counted in the city of Paris alone. According to the cops, the "wildcat" nights reached a higher level of intensity than the "invasion" of the Gilets Jaunes.

No trade union, not even the one most sympathetic to the president (CFDT) has condemned the "wildcat" demonstrations. The media, which is owned entirely by oligarchs who waited impatiently for a reversal in public opinion following the first bits of "violence," has been disappointed: two thirds of French people have continued to support the revolt. The "sovereign" refused to meet with the trade unions, clearly signaling his desire for direct confrontation without mediation. From this, everyone has deduced that there was but one strategy to adopt, namely, to articulate different forms of struggle together without paying any attention to the distinction between "violence" and "pacifism."

The massification and differentiation of participants in the marches can also be seen on the picket lines, which are just as if not more important than the demonstrations themselves. Macron's choice was likely also motivated by the not entirely successful blockade of the general strike on March 7 (by March 8, the situation had become almost normal!). But what Macron did not foresee was the acceleration of the movement following the decision to apply the 49.3 provision.

The only movement that has not been integrated into the struggle is the revolt in the banlieues. Nor was any juncture between "petits blanc" (the poorest bracket of the white proletariat) and "barbares" (French children of immigrants, the "indigenous people of the republic") achieved this time around. This matters, as we will see later, since it is the possible global revolution, the juncture between North and South, that is at stake here.

There has been a de facto and universally accepted coordination between mass struggles and the those of a minority faction dedicated to prolonging the conflict into the night through the use of trash bins that pile up on the side of the road (on account of the garbage collectors' strike) to block the police and to take out the "zbeul" (mess, from the Maghrebian Arabic zebla, trash). For the moment, let's call this the "vanguard," because I don't know what else to call it, while I hope that the usual idiots won't hurl accusations of Leninism at me. It is not a matter of bringing consciousness to a proletariat who lacks it, nor is it about the function of political

leadership, but instead a matter of composing the struggle against the iron fist imposed by the established powers. The relationship between masses on the one side, and active minorities on the other, is present in all revolutionary movements. It is not a question of suppressing this relation, but of rethinking it under new conditions.

Before the great mobilizations that we are seeing today, there were differences and divisions that traversed the French proletariat, weakening its power to wage offensives. We can only summarize them here: trade unions and institutional left-wing parties (with the exception of la France Insoumise)1 never understood the Gilets Jaunes movement — neither the nature of its workers nor their demands, which fell outside the classical norms of salaried workers. As a result, their struggles were met with indifference, or even hostility. On the other hand, it is an open enmity that these same parties (with the exception of la France Insoumise) display toward the "barbares" of the banlieues, joined by a portion of the feminist movement, when they all succumbed to the racist campaigns waged by the [established] powers and media against the "Islamic veil." For their part, neither the feminists nor the "barbares" have managed to develop their own autonomous and independent forms of organization capable of forcing the unions and other closed parties (whose base is constantly shrinking) to take them seriously. Within the "barbares," a decolonial theory has developed, many of whose positions touch on other struggles as well, but which has never managed to take root in the quartiers and develop a mass organization. The feminist movement, for its part, is well organized and has developed lucid and detailed analyses, expressing radical positions, but it does not bring about political ruptures of this magnitude. It has not waged its own political battle within the ongoing struggles, in spite of the fact that women are certainly the most impacted by the "reforms." The French proletariat is thus fragmented by racism, sexism, and new forms of precarious work.

The movement underway has shifted these lines, which is to say that it has displaced certain rifts, partially recomposing differences. Ecological actions have also recovered their strength and found resources through the current struggles. In the days that followed the clashes at Saint-Soline, where crowds attacked the construction of mega-basins designed to collect water for industrial agriculture, and against which the police deployed weapons of war, have inspired indignation and mobilized "wildcat" demonstrations of their own, albeit on a smaller scale.

Does this signal a leap in recomposition? Perhaps it is too soon to tell. In any case, the various movements that have traversed France in recent years have grafted themselves onto union mobilization while conferring upon it a different image and substance: a contestation of power and capital. In two months, they have burned Macron and left his presidency at an impasse.

When the political system of Western countries becomes oligarchic and consensus can no longer be maintained by wages, revenues, and consumption, since the latter are subject to continuous blockades and reductions, the police become the fundamental axis of "governance." Macron has managed the social struggles of his presidency by means of the police alone.

A certain brutality of intervention now forms the heart of the French strategy for maintaining order. France not only has a great revolutionary tradition; it also has a tradition of exercising counter-revolutionary violence, unprecedented in the colonies and proportional to the danger posed to power in the metropole (where, in 1848, they called in l'Armée d'Afrique, which had conquered Algeria, in order to suppress the revolution).

Henceforth, the stakes of the movement are no longer reducible to work and the rejection thereof but concern the very future of capitalism and its State, as is always the case when wars between imperial powers break out!

The lesson to be drawn from these two months of struggle concerns the urgency of rethinking and reconfiguring the question of force, its organization, and its utilization. Tactics and strategy are again becoming political necessities, questions with which movements thus far have tended to overlook, having instead focused almost exclusively on their specific relation to power (sexism, racism, ecology, wages, etc.). Yet, by objectively moving together in the absence of any subjective coordination, they have raised the overall level of confrontation while deconstructing constituted power. Either the problem of the rupture with capitalism and everything it entails will be resolved, or else our actions will remain exclusively defensive. Historically, when war breaks out between imperialist powers, what emerges is always the possibility of imperialism's "collapse" (from which a new division of power on the global market and a new cycle of accumulation can also follow). The USA, China, and Russia are fully aware of what is at stake. It is unclear whether class struggle can match that level of confrontation.

Western Autocracy

The French constitution still provides for the possibility of a "sovereign" decision within the bounds of so-called democratic institutions. Hence the invention of 49.3, which allows one to legislate without having to pass through parliament. This provision signals the inscription within the constitution of an entire chain of processes for producing political centralization that began well before the birth of capitalism. The centralization of military force (the legitimate monopoly of its exercise), which also predates capitalism, constitutes the other indispensable condition for the emergence of the State-Capital machine. The latter, for its part, will immediately initiate the centralization of economic force through the constitution of monopolies and oligopolies that have only grown in size and in economic and political weight throughout the long history of capitalism.

A significant portion of political thought has ignored the real existence of capitalism, downplaying its processes of "sovereign" centralization and thereby clearing the way for the concepts of "governmentality" (Foucault), "government" (Agamben, who was quite agitated during the pandemic, but disappeared with the hardly biopolitical war between imperialisms), and "governance."

Foucault's declarations are symptomatic, in this regard, of the counter-revolutionary theoretical climate: "Economics is a discipline without totality; economics is a discipline that begins to demonstrate not only the pointlessness, but also the impossibility of a sovereign point of view over the totality of the state that he has to govern."2 Monopolies are the "sovereigns" of the economy, which will only increase their will to totalization through their merger with the "sovereign" power of the political system and "sovereign" powers of the army and the police.

Capitalism is not identical to liberalism or neoliberalism. The two are radically distinct, and it is absurd to describe the development of the State-Capital machine as a passage from sovereign societies to disciplinary societies and societies of control. The three centralizations complement each other by always commanding forms of governmentality (liberal or neoliberal), which they may either use or abandon during moments when the class confrontation becomes more radical.

The enormous disequilibrium and polarizations between States and classes that centralizations generate lead directly to war, which once again expresses the truth of capitalism (the clash of imperialisms), a fact which has immediate political repercussions, particularly for smaller European States. While the French president asserts his sovereignty against his "people," he simultaneously loses a sizable chunk of it, as a good vassal, to the USA, which, thanks to the war against the Russian "oligarch,' has replaced the Franco-German axis with that of the US, Great Britain, and the Eastern countries, at the center of which the US has installed Poland, the most reactionary, sexist, clerical, homophobic, anti-worker, war-mongering country in Europe. From this point forward, not only is the federal hypothesis utopian, but the same is true of the Europe of Nations. The future will be made of nationalisms and new fascisms. If someone wanted to resurrect the European project after another new servile acquiescence to the logic of dollar imperialism, they would first have to engage in a struggle for liberation from Yankee colonialism.

On the international stage, France still counts for less than it did before the war, but like all little marginal marquises, Macron is unleashing all his animosity and impotence upon his "subjects" for whom he reserves treatment by his police.

According to the Financial Times from March 25, 2023, "France has the regime which, among the most developed countries, is most often compared to an autocratic dictatorship." It is amusing to see the international press of capital (the Wall Street Journal) get alarmed that "Macron's forced march to transform the French economy into a pro-business environment is done at the expense of social cohesion." Their actual concern is not for the living conditions of the millions of French proletarians, but concerns the "populist" danger that might threaten the Atlantic Alliance, NATO, and by extension, the USA, who directs it: the "parliamentary rebellion" and the "chaos that is unfolding across the country raise disturbing questions about the future of the country for all those who hope that France will remain firmly in the liberal, pro-EU, pro-NATO camp" (Politico). The Financial Times believes that France "is following the Americans, British, and Italians in opting for the populist vote." It's hard to tell whether such people are hypocrites or just irresponsible. They want to have their cake and eat it too: financial and monopolistic returns and social cohesion, democracy and the dictatorship of capital, tax-exempt businesses, generously financed by a system of social protection completely twisted in their favor, and social peace. Der Spiegel speaks of a "deficit of democracy," of "a danger to democracy itself"; meanwhile, these are the same economic policies that daily uphold the causes of Western autocracy, which have absolutely nothing, and I mean nothing, to envy in those of the East.

The Global Cycle of Struggles After 2012

What we are only just beginning to see in the struggles in France — namely, the contestation of power and capital — is what struggles in the global South immediately realized starting in 2011.

In the 20th century, the South served a decisive strategic function, even more so than the struggles in the West. The international dimension of force relations plays a decisive role when it comes to regaining the initiative. The 2008 crisis not only opened up the possibility of war (which arrived in due time), but also the possibility of revolutionary ruptures (the reality of struggles has obliged them to shift in this direction if they do not wish to be swept away by the joint actions of war and new fascisms).

The latest globalization has not simply compounded the differences between the North and the South; it has also created Norths in the South and installed Souths in the North. Under no circumstances should it be concluded from this that there is a homogeneity of political behaviors and processes of subjectivation between the North and the South. The center-periphery polarization is immanent to capitalism and must imperatively and continuously reproduce itself. Without the predation of the "South," without, that is, the imposition of a Lumpen-development and an "unequal exchange" (Samir Amin), the rate of profit is destined to drop exponentially, and this despite all the innovations, technologies, and interventions that the North can muster under the control of the greatest techno-scientific entrepreneur, the U.S. Pentagon. This is the most important reason for the current war. The South wants to leave this relation of subordination, and has, in fact, already partially done so. It is this political will that threatens American financial and monetary hegemony and its political and productive supremacy.

There are at least two important political differences that remain between the West and the rest of the world. Despite the fact that they constitute one of the poorest and most exploited strata of the French proletariat, the persistent failure to integrate the "barbares" in the French banlieues into the current cycle of struggles is already a symptom, internal to Western countries, of the difficulties involved in overcoming the "colonial divide" from which Whites have long profited.

In the context of the cycle of struggles that began in 2011, a differentiation similar to that of the 20th century is reappearing. Back then, the socialist or national liberation revolutions (with socialist connotations in each case) that spread across the South erupted alongside mass struggles in the West, occasionally very strong ones, but all of which proved unable to generate successful revolutionary processes. Today, we have massive strikes in Europe (France, Great Britain, Spain, and even Germany) and, on the contrary, veritable revolts, insurrections, and the opening of revolutionary processes in the South. Let's take a few examples — Egypt and Tunisia, who inaugurated the cycle in 2011, and Chile and Iran, more recently — in order to highlight the differences and possible convergences [between now and then].

It is difficult to compare the Arab Spring uprisings to "Occupy Wall Street," even if there was a circulation of forms of struggle: the destitution of constituted power, millions of people being mobilized, political systems shaken to their very foundations, a repression resulting in hundreds of deaths, the possibility of initiating a real revolutionary process that was immediately aborted because, as a sign in Cairo read during the uprising, "half revolution, no revolution." Occupy Wall Street never witnessed force relations of that magnitude. Neither did it produce, even for brief periods, "voids," the destructuring or delegitimizing of apparatuses of power, like the uprisings in the South occasionally do. It is always the South that opens and promotes new waves of struggle (see also South American feminism) that are reproduced with less intensity and strength in the North. In Chile, neoliberalism was born following the physical destruction by the State-Capital machine of revolutionary processes, a machine that called upon Hayek and Friedman to rebuild the market, competition, and human capital following the massacre (never confuse neoliberalism with imperialism or with capitalism, always distinguish them!). Chile gave rise to another kind of insurrection, from which we can learn other lessons, even if, as in North Africa, they concern political defeats.

By contrast with Egypt, in Chile a multiplicity of movements (notably the feminist and indigenous movements) found expression within the revolt. But at a certain moment of class struggle, we are confronted by a power that is no longer only patriarchal or heterosexual, no longer only racist, no longer only the power of the master, but the general power of the State-Capital machine that includes each of these powers, reorganizes them, and at the same time exceeds them. The enemy is not even just national power, the sovereignty of a State like Chile. In such situations, if we are directly confronted with imperialist policies this is because any political rupture — as was the case in Egypt (more so than in Tunisia) or in Chile or Iran — risks calling into question the relations of force on the world market, the global organization of power: the Chilean and Egyptian uprisings were closely tracked by the USA, which did not hesitate to intervene with its "strategic interference." A similar situation occurred in France: what began as a struggle of the "trades" quickly found itself confronting the totality of the State-Capital machine. In these moments of struggle, there is a point of no return for both protagonists, for it is

not possible to sustain stable forms of counter-power, “liberated” zones or territories, except for short periods of time. The Zapatista solution is neither generalizable nor reproducible (as the Zapatistas themselves have always stated). It is hard to see how a sustainable “dual power” could be implemented within the current conditions of capitalism. At the same time, the seizure of power has not seemed to be much of a priority since 1968. The situation is puzzling, to say the least!

Despite the political differences between the North and the South, certain shared problems emerge: what political subject can we construct that would be capable both of organizing the multiplicity of forms of struggle and perspectives, and posing the question of dual power and the organization of force?

Revolts and insurrections (but also, albeit in a different way, the struggles in France) produce a series of enigmas or impossibilities: the impossibility of totalizing and synthesizing struggles, and the impossibility of remaining in a situation of dispersion and differentiation; the impossibility of avoiding revolt through a deconstruction of power, and the impossibility of seizing power; the impossibility of organizing the passage from multiplicity to the dualisms of power that are imposed upon us, in one fashion or another, by the enemy, and the impossibility of remaining strictly within the plane of multiplicity and difference; the impossibility of centralization, and the impossibility of confronting the enemy without centralization. The struggle against these impossibilities forms the condition for a revolutionary creation of the possible. It is only under these conditions, by resolving these enigmas, by overcoming these impossibilities that the impossible becomes possible.

The second major difference between the North and the South concerns the ongoing war and imperialism. Imperialism refers to the qualitative leap that was reached through the integration of the three processes of economic, political, and military centralization, a leap sanctioned by the First World War. These processes reach their apogee in the “neoliberalism” of free competition, free enterprise, and the fight against any concentration of power that distorts competition. Not content with the predation they carry out on a global scale and the reorganization of welfare that they have forced in their favor, these processes are carried to the point of imposing, as they do, the inflation of profits (“pricing power,” the ability to fix prices, even if it runs counter to their own self-proclaimed “neoliberalism”).

The French movement has not articulated itself in terms of the war between imperial powers. Yet the struggle against pension reforms remains part of this framework, even if the question has never been posed, and even if the fact that Europe is at war and that the West is reorganizing welfare into warfare changes the political picture considerably. It is perhaps better this way, even if it marks an obvious political limitation — for had it expressed itself in such a manner, divergent, or even opposing, political positions would likely have emerged.

In the South, by contrast, the verdict concerning the war is clear and unanimous: it is a war between imperial powers, at the origin of which we nevertheless find an American imperialism to which the suicidal European political classes adhere. The South is divided between States that support neutrality and others that place themselves on the side of Russia — yet all of them reject sanctions and the provision of arms.3

In the South, the category of imperialism has never been called into question like it has been in the West. The great blunder that was Hardt and Negri’s Empire, whose supranational formation never began, is indicative of a difference in analysis and political sensibility that led them to claim, in the final volume of their trilogy, that after having tested war, the impossible Empire would then opt for finance. It is precisely the opposite that has happened: American finance, having produced (and still producing) repeating crises that continuously put capitalism at the brink of collapse — saved exclusively by the intervention of State sovereignty (the United States being chief among them) — is forcing these same states into war. Contemporary imperialism, whose concept could be summarized (while greatly simplifying things) by the monopoly/currency/war triangle, also sheds light on the limitations of theories that have ignored it, and obliges us to adopt the perspective of the South, which itself has never abandoned [an analysis of] imperialism for the simple reason that it still has it on its back. We do too, but we prefer to play it off as if we didn’t!

How Do We Escape Counter-Revolution?

We rightly admire the French proletarian struggle. We are enthusiastic because we recognize features of 19th century revolutions (and even the great revolution of ’89) that, with a continuity and an intensity that cannot be found in any other Western country, continue to give the counter-revolution a hard time. But we must remain vigilant. If French proletarians rise up with impressive regularity against “reforms,” they have so far only managed to delay their implementation or marginally modify their details, while nevertheless producing and sedimenting unprecedented processes of subjectivation that continue to accumulate, as is the case with current struggles (from those against the labor law to the Gilets Jaunes and through the ZAD). The struggles, however, have all been, at least so far, defensive, the reactive

meaning of which can of course be reversed, but a considerable handicap remains at the outset.

In order to explain what must (despite the tremendous resistance they mounted) be called “defeats,” we ought perhaps to revisit the manner in which wage-based, social, and political conquests have been imposed. If, in the 19th century, the first victories had been the fruit of class struggle waged by European workers, the South played an increasingly important strategic role in the 20th century. It was the revolutions, which remained a threat to the North and were victorious in the South, that brought the State-Capital machine to a standstill, forcing it to make certain concessions. What was frightening to the machine was the autonomy and independence of the proletarian perspective expressed therein. The combination of peasant revolutions in the South and workers’ struggles in the North led to an objective front of struggles beyond the “color line” that imposed wage increases and welfare in the North and a rupture of the colonial division that had reigned for four centuries in the South. This is the most important result of the Soviet Revolution (Lenin had never gone to London or Detroit, he was rather seen in Peking, Hanoi, Algiers…), one which was prolonged and extended by “oppressed peoples” alone.

In the same way that socialism is impossible in a single country, it is impossible to impose conditions on the State-Capital machine from within one country.

The Western working class had been defeated by the outbreak of the First World War, when the overwhelming majority of the labor movement agreed to submit to their own slaughter for the glory of their respective national bourgeoisies. When the working class and the labor movement redeemed themselves via antifascism, the initiative had already been placed in the hands of the “peasant” revolutions which, by their force, pushed the capitalist centers back to the East. During this era, the Western working classes were integrated into development and, even if they revolted, they would never do so in a way that really threatened the State-Capital machine. During this same time, revolutions of the South were being turned either into machines for production or Nation-States.

Once the revolutionary threat to the North and its real presence in the South had waned, the balance of power was radically reversed: we began to lose and continue to lose, piece by piece, everything that we had won in those years (the transition from 1960 to 1967, seven years of life captured in a single stroke by capital, is perhaps the clearest sign of defeat). Up until the counter-revolution that began in the 1970s, even when we were defeated politically, we advanced socially and economically. Today, we are losing on both fronts. Today, after the crisis of 2008, decisive struggles are breaking out everywhere (the French March is one of them), but unless the network of insurrections and struggles on the global scale develops anew, and this time subjectively, I doubt that we can break out of the counter-revolutionary cage.

Well-meaning people are proposing to civilize the class struggle at the origin of international wars. We wish them good luck. In a single century (1914-2022), different imperialisms have brought humanity to the edge of the abyss four times: The First and Second World Wars, culminating in Nazism, and the Cold War through which the possibility of a nuclear ending to humanity was concretized for the first time. The current war, of which Ukraine will only be one episode, could revive this latter possibility.

Faced with this tragic and recurrent repetition of wars between imperial powers (not to mention the others), the question we should be asking concerns the reconstruction of international relations of force and the elaboration of a concept of war (which is to say, of strategy) adapted to this new situation. The Communist Manifesto gave us a definition that is still relevant today, even if it has been suppressed or has fallen into the oblivion of pacification: “uninterrupted war, sometimes hidden, sometimes open.” Hidden or open, it always and in every case requires a knowledge of force relations , a strategy, and an art of rupture adapted to these relations. War, historically — but it still seems to be the case today — can give rise either to a “revolutionary transformation,” or to a new accumulation of capital on the global scale. One other possibility that Marx and Engels’ Manifesto considered is also on the table, exacerbated by the current ecological disaster: “the destruction” not only “of both classes in struggle,” but also of humanity.

Maurizio Lazzarato, for Il Will

Proletarian Dictatorship and Class Party

Every class struggle is a political struggle (Marx).

A struggle which limits itself to obtaining a new distribution of economic gains is not yet a political struggle because it is not directed against the social structure of the production relations.

The disruption of the relations of production peculiar to a particular social epoch and the overthrow of the rule of a certain social class is the result of a long and often fluctuating political struggle. The key to this struggle is the question of the state: the problem of "who has power?" (Lenin).

The struggle of the modern proletariat manifests and extends itself as a political struggle with the formation and the action of the class party. The specific features of this party are to be found in the following thesis: the complete development of the industrial capitalist system and of bourgeois power which issued from the liberal and democratic revolutions, not only does not historically exclude but prepares and sharpens more and more the conflict of class interests and its development into civil war, into armed struggle.

The communist party, as defined by this historical foresight and by this program, accomplishes the following tasks as long as the bourgeoisie maintains power:

a) it elaborates and propagates the theory of social development, of the economic laws which characterise the present social system of production relations, of class conflicts which arise from it, of the state and of the revolution;

b) it assures the unity and historical persistence of the proletarian organisation. Unity does not mean the material grouping of the working class and seeming working class strata which, due to the very fact of the dominance of the exploiting class, are tinder for the influence of discordant political leaderships and methods of action. It means instead the close international linking-up of the vanguard elements who are fully orientated on the integral revolutionary line. Persistence means the continuous claim of the unbroken dialectical line which binds together the positions of critique and struggle successively adopted by the movement during the course of changing conditions;

c) it prepares well in advance for the class mobilisation and offensive by appropriately employing every possible means of propaganda, agitation and action, in all particular struggles triggered off by immediate interests. This action culminates in the organisation of the illegal and insurrectional apparatus for the conquest of power.

When general conditions and the degree of organisational, political and tactical solidity of the class party reach a point where the general struggle for power is unleashed, the party which has led the revolutionary class to victory through the social war, leads it likewise in the fundamental task of breaking and demolishing all the military and administrative organs which compose the capitalist state. This demolition also strikes at the network of organs, whatever they may be, which pretend to represent the various opinions or interests through the intermediary of bodies of delegates. The bourgeois class state must be destroyed whether it presents itself as the mendacious interclassist expression of the majority of citizens or as the more or less open dictatorship wielded by a government apparatus which pretends to fulfil a national, racial or social-popular mission; if this does not take place, the revolution will be crushed.

In the phase which follows the dismantling of the apparatus of capitalist domination, the task of the political party of the working class is as vital as ever because the class struggle — though dialectically inverted — continues.

Communist theory in regard to the state and the revolution is characterised above all by the fact that it excludes all possibility of adapting the legislative and executive mechanism of the bourgeois state to the socialist transformation of the economy (the social-democratic position). But it equally excludes the possibility of achieving by means of a brief violent crisis a destruction of the state and a transformation of the traditional economic relationships which the state defended up to the last moment (the anarchist position). It also denies that the constitution of a new productive organisation can be left to the spontaneous and scattered activity of groups of producers shop by shop or trade by trade (the syndicalist position).

Any social class whose power has been overthrown, even if it is by means of terror, survives for a long time within the texture of the social organism. Far from abandoning its hopes of revenge, it seeks to politically reorganise itself and to re-establish its domination either in a violent or disguised way. It has turned from a ruling class into a defeated and dominated one, but it has not instantly disappeared.

The proletariat — which in its turn will disappear as a class alongside all other classes with the realisation of communism — organises itself as a ruling class (the Manifesto) in the first stage of the post-capitalist epoch. And after the destruction of the old state, the new proletarian state is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The precondition for going beyond the capitalist system is the overthrow of bourgeois power and the destruction of its state. The condition for bringing about the deep and radical social transformation which has to take place is a new proletarian state apparatus, capable of using force and coercion just as all other historical states.

The presence of such an apparatus does not characterise communist society but instead it characterises the stage of its construction. Once this construction is secured, classes and class rule will no longer exist. But the essential organ of class rule is the state — and the state can be nothing else. Therefore communists do not advocate the proletarian state as a mystical creed, an absolute or an ideal but as a dialectical tool, a class weapon that will slowly wither away (Engels) through the very realisation of its functions; this will take place gradually, through a long process, as the social organisation is transformed from a system of coercion of men (as it has always been since the dawn of history) into a comprehensive, scientifically built network for the management of things and natural forces.

After the victory of the proletariat, the role of the state in relationship to social classes and collective organisations exhibits many fundamental differences as compared with its role in the history of the regimes that spring from the bourgeois revolution.

a) Revolutionary bourgeois ideology, prior to its struggle and final victory, presented its future post-feudal state not as a class state but as a peoples state based on the abolition of every inequality before the law, which it presented to be sufficient to assure freedom and equality for all members of society.

Proletarian theory openly asserts that its future state will be a class state, i.e. a tool wielded by one class as long as classes exist. The other classes will be excluded from the state and outlawed in fact as well as in principle. The working class having achieved power "will share it with no one" (Lenin).

b) After the bourgeois political victory and in keeping with a tenacious ideological campaign, constitutional charters or declarations of principles were solemnly proclaimed in the different countries as a basis and foundation of the state. They were considered as being immutable in time, a definitive expression of the at last discovered immanent rules of social life. From then on, the entire interplay of political forces was supposed to take place within the insuperable framework of these statutes.

During the struggle against the existing regime, the proletarian state is not presented as a stable and fixed realisation of a set of rules governing the social relationships inferred from an idealistic research into the nature of man and society. During its lifetime the working class state will continually evolve up to the point that it finally withers away: the nature of social organisation, of human association, will radically change according to the

development of technology and the forces of production, and man's nature will be equally subject to deep alterations always moving away more and more from the beast of burden and slave which he was. Anything such as a codified and permanent constitution to be proclaimed after the workers revolution is nonsense, it has no place in the communist program. Technically, it will be convenient to adopt written rules which however will in no way be intangible and will retain an "instrumental" and temporary character, putting aside the facetiousnesses about social ethics and natural law.

c) Having conquered and even crushed the feudal apparatus of power, the victorious capitalist class did not hesitate to use the force of the state to repress the attempts of counterrevolution and restoration. However the most resolute terroristic measures were justified as being directed not against the class enemies of capitalism but against the betrayers of the people, of the nation, of the country, and of civil society, all these hollow concepts being identified with the state itself and, as a matter of fact, with the government and the party in power.

The victorious proletariat, by using its state in order to "crush the unavoidable and desperate resistance of the bourgeoisie" (Lenin) will strike at the old rulers and their last supporters every time they oppose, in a logical defence of their class interests, the measures intended to uproot economic privilege. These social elements will keep an estranged and passive position vis-à-vis the apparatus of power: whenever they try to free themselves from the passivity imposed upon them, material force will subdue them. They will share no "social contract", they will have no "legal or patriotic duty". As veritable social prisoners of war (as in fact were the former aristocrats and clergymen for the Jacobean bourgeoisie) they will have nothing to betray because they will not be requested to take any ridiculous oath of allegiance.

d) The historical glitter of the popular assemblies and democratic gatherings hardly disguised the fact that, at its birth, the bourgeois state formed armed bodies and a police force for the internal and external struggle against the old regime and quickly substituted the guillotine for the gallows. This executive apparatus was charged with the task of administering legal force both on the great historical level and against isolated violations of the rules of appropriation and exchange characteristic of the economy founded on private property. It acted in a perfectly natural manner against the first proletarian movements which threatened, even if only instinctively, the bourgeois form of production. The imposing reality of the new social dualism was hidden by the game of the "legislative" apparatus which claimed to be able to bring about the participation of all citizens and all the opinions of the various parties in the state and in the management of the state with a perfect equilibrium and within an atmosphere of social peace.

The proletarian state, as an open class dictatorship, will dispose of all distinctions between the executive and legislative levels of power, both of which will be united in the same organs. The distinction between the legislative and executive is, in effect, characteristic of a regime which conceals and protects the dictatorship of one class under an external cloak which is multi-class and multi-party. "The Commune was a working, not a parliamentary body" (Marx).

e) The bourgeois state in its classical form — in coherence with an individualist ideology which the theoretical fiction universally extends to all citizens and which is the mental reflection of the reality of an economy founded on the monopoly of private property by one class — refused to allow any intermediate body other than elective constitutional assemblies to exist between the isolated individual subject and the legal state centre. Political clubs and parties that had been necessary during the instructional stage were tolerated by it by virtue of the demagogic assertion of free thought and on the condition that they exist as simple confessional groupings and electoral bureaux. In a later stage the reality of class repression forced the state to tolerate the association of economic interests, the labour unions, which it distrusted as a "state within the state". Finally, unions became a form of class solidarity adopted by the capitalists themselves for their own class interests and aims. Moreover, under the pretext of legally recognising the labour unions, the state undertook the task of absorbing and sterilising them, thus depriving them of any autonomy so as to prevent the revolutionary party from taking their leadership.

Labour unions will still be present in the proletarian state in so far as there still remains employers or at least impersonal enterprises where the workers remain wage earners paid in money. Their function will be to protect the standard of living of the working class, their action being parallel on this point to that of the party and the state. Non-working class unions will be forbidden. Actually, on the question of distribution of income between the working class and the non-proletarian or semi-proletarian classes, the worker's situation could be threatened by considerations other than the superior needs of the general revolutionary struggle against international capitalism. But this possibility, which will long subsist, justifies the unions' secondary role in relation to the political communist party, the international revolutionary vanguard, which forms a unitary whole with the parties struggling in the still capitalist countries and as such leads the proletarian state.

The proletarian state can only be "animated" by a single party and it would be senseless to require that this party organise in its ranks a statistical majority and be

supported by such a majority in "popular elections" — that old bourgeois trap. One of the historical possibilities is the existence of political parties composed in appearance by proletarians, but in reality influenced by counterrevolutionary traditions or by foreign capitalisms. This contradiction, the most dangerous of all, cannot be resolved through the recognition of formal rights nor through the process of voting within the framework of an abstract "class democracy". This too will be a crisis to be liquidated in terms of relationships of force. There is no statistical contrivance which can ensure a satisfactory revolutionary solution; this will depend solely upon the degree of solidity and clarity reached by the revolutionary communist movement throughout the world. A century ago in the West, and fifty years ago in the Czarist Empire, Marxists rightly argued against the simple-minded democrats that the capitalists and proprietors are a minority, and therefore the only true government of the majority is the government of the working class. If the word democracy means power of the majority, the democrats should stand on our class side. But this word both in its literal sense ("power of the people") as well as in the dirty use that is more and more being made of it, means "power belonging not to one but to all classes". For this historical reason, just as we reject "bourgeois democracy" and "democracy in general" (as Lenin also did), we must politically and theoretically exclude, as a contradiction in terms, "class democracy" and "workers' democracy".

The dictatorship advocated by marxism is necessary because it cannot be unanimously accepted and furthermore it will not have the naiveté to abdicate for lack of having a majority of votes, if such a thing were ascertainable. Precisely because it declares this it will not run the risk of being confused with a dictatorship of men or groups of men who take control of the government and substitute themselves for the working class. The revolution requires a dictatorship, because it would be ridiculous to subordinate the revolution to a 100% acceptance or a 51% majority. Wherever these figures are displayed, it means that the revolution has been betrayed.

In conclusion the communist party will rule alone, and will never give up power without a physical struggle. This bold declaration of not yielding to the deception of figures and of not making use of them will aid the struggle against revolutionary degeneration.

In the higher stage of communism — a stage which does not know commodity production, money nor nations and which will also witness the death of the state — labour unions will be deprived of their "reason to be". The party as an organisation for combat will be necessary as long as the remnants of capitalism survive in the world. Moreover, it may always have the task of being the depository and propagator of social doctrine, which gives a general vision of the development of relationships between human society and material nature.

The marxist conception, that of substituting parliamentary assemblies with working bodies, does not lead us back into "economic democracy" either, i.e. into a system which would adapt the state organs to the workplaces, to the productive or commercial units, etc., while excluding from any representative function the remaining employers and the individuals still owning property. The elimination of the employer and the proprietor only defines half of socialism; the other half, the most significant one, consists of the elimination of capitalist economic anarchy (Marx). As the new socialist organisation emerges and develops with the party and the revolutionary state in the foreground, it will not limit itself to striking only the former employers and their flunkies but above all it will redistribute the social tasks and responsibilities of individuals in quite a new and original way.

Therefore the network of enterprises and services such as they have been inherited from capitalism will not be taken as the basis of an apparatus of so-called "sovereignty", that is of the delegation of powers within the state and up to the level of its central bodies. It is precisely the presence of the single-class state and of the solidly and qualitatively unitary and homogeneous party which offers the maximum of favourable conditions for a reshaping of social machinery that be driven as little as possible by the pressures of the limited interests of small groups and as much as possible by general data and by their scientific study in the interests of the collective welfare. The changes in the productive mechanism will be enormous; let us only think of the program for reversing the relationships between town and country, on which Marx and Engels insisted so much and which is the exact antithesis to present trends in all countries.

Therefore, the network modelled after the work place is an inadequate expression which repeats the old Proudhonist and Lassalian positions that Marxism long ago rejected and surpassed.

The definition of the type of links between the organs of the class state and its base depends first of all upon the results of historical dialectics and cannot be deduced from "eternal principles", from "natural law", or from a sacred and inviolable constitutional charter. Any further details in this regard would be mere utopia. There is not a grain of utopianism in Marx, Engels stated. The very idea of the famous delegation of power by the isolated individual (elector) thanks to a platonic act emanating from his freedom of opinion must be left to the foggy realms of metaphysics; opinions in actuality are but a reflection of material conditions and social forms, and power consists of the intervention of physical force.

The negative characterisation of the proletarian dictatorship is clearly defined: the bourgeois and

semi-bourgeois will no longer have political rights, they will be prevented by force from gathering in groups of common interests or in associations for political agitation; they will never be allowed to vote, elect, or delegate others to any post or function whatsoever. But even the relationship between the worker — a recognised and active member of the class in power — and the state apparatus will no longer retain that fictitious and deceitful characteristic of a delegation of power, of a representation through the intermediary of a deputy, an election ticket, or by a party. Delegation means in effect the renunciation to the possibility of direct action. The pretended "sovereignty" of the democratic right is but an abdication, and in most cases it is an abdication in favour of a scoundrel.

The working members of society will be grouped into local territorial organs according to their place of residence, and in certain cases according to the displacements imposed by their participation in a productive mechanism in full transformation. Thanks to their uninterrupted and continuous action, the participation of all active social elements in the mechanism of the state apparatus, and therefore in the management and exercise of class power, will be assured. To sketch these mechanisms is impossible before the class relationships from which they will spring have been concretely realised.

The Paris Commune established as most important principles (see Marx, Engels, Lenin) that its members and officials would be subject to recall at any time, and that their salary would not exceed the wage of an average worker. Any separation between the producers on the periphery and the bureaucrats at the centre is thus eliminated by means of systematic rotations. Civil service will cease being a career and even a profession. No doubt, when put into practice, these controls will create tremendous difficulties, but it was long ago that Lenin expressed his contempt for all plans of revolutions to be carried out without difficulties! The inevitable conflicts will not be completely resolved by drawing up piles of rules and regulations: they will constitute a historical and political problem and will express a real relationship of forces. The Bolshevik revolution did not stop in front of the Constituent Assembly but dispersed it. The workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils had risen. This new type of state organs which burst forth in the blaze of the social war (and were already present in the revolution of 1905) extended from the village to the entire country through a network of territorial units; their formation did not answer to any of the prejudices about the "rights of man" or the "universal, free, direct and secret" suffrage!

The communist party unleashes and wins the civil war, it occupies the key positions in a military and social sense, it multiplies its means of propaganda and agitation a thousand-fold through seizing buildings and public establishments. And without losing time and without procedural whims, it establishes the "armed bodies of workers" of which Lenin spoke, the red guard, the revolutionary police. At the meetings of the Soviets, it wins over a majority to the slogan: "All power to the Soviets!". Is this majority a merely legal, or a coldly and plainly numerical fact? Not at all! Should anyone — be he a spy or a well-intentioned but misled worker — vote for the Soviet to renounce or compromise the power conquered thanks to the blood of the proletarian fighters, he will be kicked out by his comrades' rifle butts. And no one will waste time with counting him in the "legal minority", that criminal hypocrisy which the revolution can do without and which the counterrevolution can only feed upon.

Historical facts different from those of Russia in 1917 (i.e. the recent collapse of feudal despotism, a disastrous war, the role played by opportunist leaders) could create, while remaining on the same fundamental line, different practical forms of the basic network of the state. From the time the proletarian movement left utopianism behind, it has found its way and assured its success thanks not only to the real experience of the present mode of production and the structure of the present state, but also to the experience of the strategic mistakes of the proletarian revolution, both on the battlefield of the "hot" civil war where the Communards of 1871 gloriously fell and on the "cold" one which was lost between 1917 and 1926 — this last was the great battle of Russia between Lenin's International and world capitalism supported in the front lines by the miserable complicity of all the opportunists.

Communists have no codified constitutions to propose. They have a world of lies and constitutions — crystallised in the law and in the force of the dominant class — to crush. They know that only a revolutionary and totalitarian apparatus of force and power, which excludes no means, will be able to prevent the infamous relics of a barbarous epoch from rising again — only it will be able to prevent the monster of social privilege, craving for revenge and servitude, from raising its head again and hurling for the thousandth time its deceitful cry of **Freedom**!

Amadeo Bordiga

Wages for Schoolwork: What it Means

"Elementary education by the state" is altogether objectionable. Defining by a general law the expenditures on the elementary schools, the qualifications of the teaching staff, the branches of instruction, etc., and, as is done in the United States, supervising the fulfilment of these legal specifications by state inspectors, is a very different thing from appointing the state as the educator of the people! Government and church should rather be equally excluded from any influence on the school. Particularly, indeed, in the Prusso-German Empire (and one should not take refuge in the rotten subterfuge that one is speaking of a "state of the future"; we have seen how matters stand in this respect) the state has need, on the contrary, of a very stern education by the people.

But the whole program, for all its democratic clang, is tainted through and through by the Lassallean sect's servile belief in the state, or, what is no better, by a democratic belief in miracles; or rather it is a compromise between these two kinds of belief in miracles, both equally remote from socialism.

- Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program, Part 4

Attending school, be it a secondary school, a technical college, or a university, is work. The form of this work, known as schoolwork, is a variety of skilled and unskilled labour. Often it is heavily disciplined work, especially in the secondary schools. Often it is work that workers pay to do, in the case of the tertiary institutions. We believe that this form of work should be remunerated in the form of wages. It is long overdue. The persistence of the current arrangement has set back the organisation of students by decades. Forward thinking, critically minded students, who seem today to be in the minority, must begin to organise on this basis: for it is this demand that clarifies the exact nature of the student struggle.

The Current Arrangement

What is education? This question will usually garner an array of vague and sentimental answers, about the value of moral example, the virtue of self improvement, the importance of critical thinking, the need for a civil culture, and the instilling of humanist values. It is up to us to put aside these sentiments for a moment, if we are to consider this matter from the standpoint of critical political economy: education, to put it simply, is work.

Students work. Hard. They read, write, commute, take exams, attend classes, participate in group work, and all other manner of activities. Being a successful student, we are told, requires as much as 40 hours a week of hard, consistent work. And yet, we are told, we are not workers. We do not get paid wages. We

are instead told that education is for OUR BENEFIT, and that we should be grateful for it. Indeed, we are made to take on excessive debts in order to attend these educational institutions.

> *Like all capitalistic institutions, schools are factories. Grading and tracking are ways of measuring our productivity within the school-factory. Not only are we trained to take our future "position in society" but we are also being programmed to go to our "proper place." The school-factory is an essential step in the selection process that will send some to sweep the streets and some to supervise the sweepers.* - **Wages for Students, 1975**

But is education really for our benefit? Despite the sentimentalities of the bourgeois academics and their managers, we do not believe that one receives a genuine, emancipatory education at the contemporary university. Indeed, it seems that the university is more of a factory for the production of credentials than it is a bastion of learning. The university, and education, more than being for our benefit, is for the benefit of capital.

Not only that, but these institutions of capitalist control serve a second function to the reproduction of skilled labour. They also serve to reproduce capitalist ideology - they serve as part of the Ideological State Apparatus, which serves to naturalise the alien system of capitalist production.

The capitalist firms, be they the state or private enterprise, that employ credentialed labour, benefit greatly from the enforcement of minimum educational standards, and from the training that they do not pay a cent to receive. It is the firms that employ us that benefit from years of training, value added to our labour power, that we paid for the right to attend. If the ultimate beneficiary of this arrangement is capital, then why on earth aren't we being paid?

The Student Left

Today, one will find no greater defenders of the sentimental view on education than amongst the so-called student radicals. Having totally abandoned a revolutionary critique of the university itself, these students seek to defend the university from what they see as the malign and corrupting influence of "neoliberal capitalism". They are opposed to staff cuts, to course reorganisation, to corporate meddling in the university, and even demand free education - but they do not make any to challenge the bourgeois foundations of the school system itself. They want to defend the public schools from austerity and corporate influence: but they say nothing of the role this public education plays in maintaining capitalist ideological hegemony.

This is because these so-called radicals do not seek to overturn the system! They simply wish to supplant one form of capitalist rule for a more gentle, more humanistic, more cultured version. Because of this, you will not find a greater defender of the education system than the "radical" student or the "socialist" teacher. They will not talk about wages for schoolwork! Because such a demand exposes the relationship that they hold sacred.

Why Wages?

Why not increase the welfare payments that students receive?

While students would certainly benefit from an increase in the student support payment, this would not alter the appearance of the relationship between students, the university, and capital. Indeed, it would simply preserve the appearance that students are NOT workers, that they are members of a separate category, and that our support payments are some kind of generous social benefit. It would maintain the fraud of education.

By fighting for wages for students, paid by the hour for our work by the state, we would be seen, and see ourselves, for what we are. Workers. Workers who toil on behalf of capital collectively, on behalf of our future employers, on behalf of all manner of parasitic capitalist research programs. This would allow us to organise as workers do. It is true that students have their own unions, but these organisations do not negotiate the sale of our labour power in the same way that trade unions do. We would change this. Students could bargain, set minimum standards, enforce contracts, and fight to raise our wages. This would take the contradiction, the struggle, between student and university, between student and capital, and make it clear.

We cannot overcome our oppression, our impoverishment, our alienation, until we have labelled the nature of our struggle. Let us do away with the mysticism of bourgeois education. Wages for schoolwork would provide an entirely different type of schooling altogether.

We are fed up with working for free

We demand real money now for the schoolwork we do.

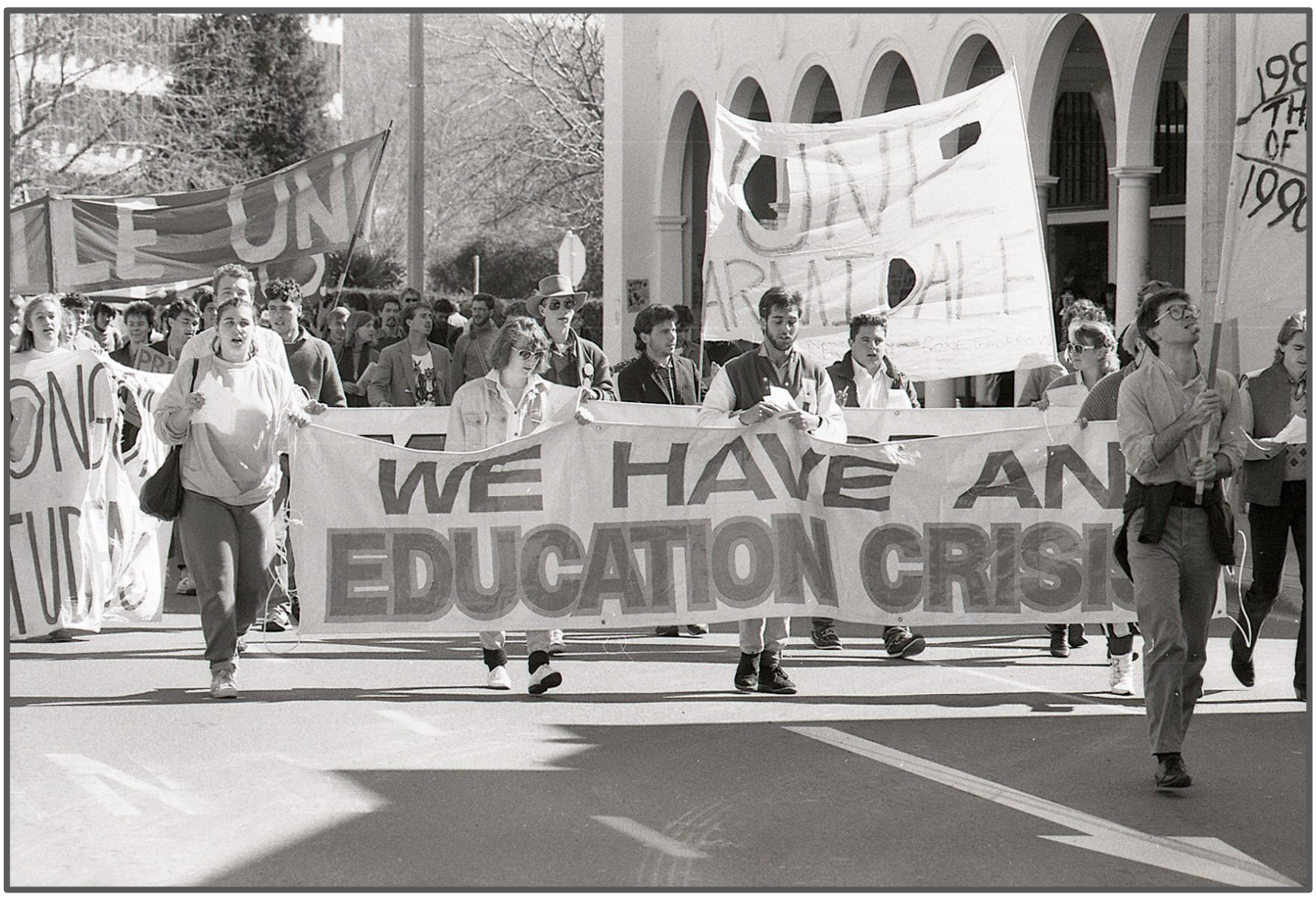
We must force capital, which profits from our work, to pay for our schoolwork. Only then can we stop depending on financial aid, our parents, working second and third jobs or working during summer vacations for our existence. We already earn a wage; now we must be paid for it. Only in this way can we seize more power to use in our dealings with capital.

We can do a lot with the money. First, we will have to work less as the "need to work" additional jobs disappears. Second, we will immediately enjoy a higher standard of living since we will have more to spend when we take time off from schoolwork. Third, we will raise the average wage in the entire area affected by the presence of us low-cost workers.

By taking time off from schoolwork to demand wages for students, we think and act against the work we are doing. it also puts us in a better position to get the money.

No more unpaid schoolwork! - **Wages for Students, 1975**

Edith Fischer



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